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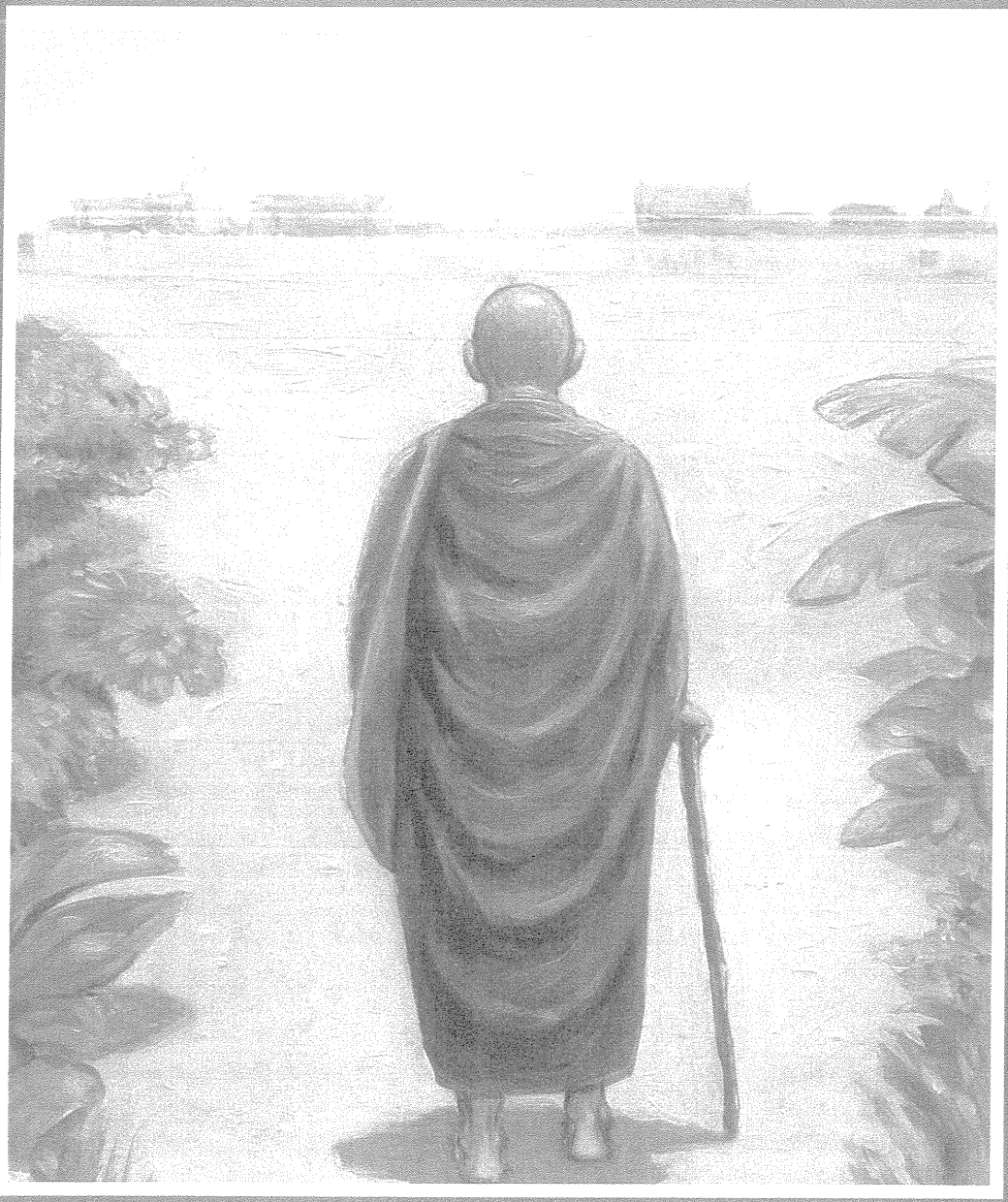
THE SUPREME PATRIARCH AND HIS WALKING STICK

The Meditation Legacy of Suk Kaithuean and its Implications for Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand



Patrick Ong

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THE SUPREME PATRIARCH AND HIS WALKING STICK

THE MEDITATION LEGACY OF SUK KAITHUEAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THERAVADA BUDDHISM IN THAILAND

Patrick Ong Pei Wen

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Cover: The illustration on the front cover depicts the Venerable Suk Kaithuean emerging from the forest with the aid of his walking stick overlooking the newly established city of Bangkok. This was based on a vision the author had and was created with the help of Thai artist Don Jumsai in 2013.

Foreword

The Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) is an interdisciplinary academic research institute within Chulalongkorn University functioning as an inter-institutional organization, with the aim to promote interdisciplinary studies bearing on Asian affairs. The Institute's activities include conducting research, organizing academic seminars and training, exchanging scholars and publishing books and journals relating to Asian issues. The Institute also develops audio-visual aids to promote interest in Asian affairs among the general public.

The Supreme Patriarch and His Walking Stick is derived from an MA thesis that aims to investigate the Matchima meditation system taught at Wat Ratchasittharam. This book interestingly reflects the flexibility of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand since the reign of King Mongkut or Rama IV. It indeed proves the fact that Theravada Buddhism in Thailand is more flexible and dynamic than previously conceived. To prove his argument, the author has brought back a dying practice, which was taught about two-hundred years ago by a forest monk named Suk Kaiththeuan, who was eventually appointed as the fourth Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. According to temple records, Suk Kaithuean played an important role in establishing the Matchima meditation system in the country.

This volume has been supported financially by the "Dr. Wolfgang Wittwer Memorial Fund" administered by the IAS. The Fund was jointly established by the IAS and the Volkswagen Foundation in memory of Dr. Wolfgang Wittwer who headed the Asian Studies Program of the Volkswagen Foundation and passed away during his term of duty in the 1980s. This project aims at promoting selected thesis of young scholars in areas relating to Asia at the international level and meets the IAS's primary mission in creating a better understanding of the Thai perspective on

Asian issues among English readers. The IAS also plans to publish many more interesting research works of a similar nature.

We are profoundly grateful to the author and his advisor for their contribution to this volume. Needless to say, without their cooperation this publication would have been impossible. Special thanks is also due to Dr. Wolfgang Wittwer Memorial Fund for support and contribution to the publication, and Dr. Khien Theeravit who has put a great deal of effort in establishing this English publication project.

Sunait Chutintaranond
Director, Institute of Asian Studies
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
December 2013

Foreword

One of the most interesting challenges in teaching Thai Buddhism is the demonstration of the elements of "Thainess" in Buddhism. As we all know, Buddhism is a universal religion, which deals with the universal condition of life, namely birth, old age, sickness and death. But then, all universal dimensions are played out in a particular historical, cultural world with its own ethos, cultural grammar and politics.

Patrick Ong's well researched and well-written book, 'The Supreme Patriarch and his Walking Stick" on Venerable Suk Kaithuean (1733-1822) or Suk of the Forest Fowl, the fourth Supreme Patriarch of the Bangkok era, gives the readers a very fine example of what spiritual, historical, cultural, and political elements all working in tandem, constitute "Thai Buddhism".

The book opens with a brief and highly relevant background of key meditation movements in contemporary Thailand, discussing their contributions and noticeable absence of detailed research in the transmission of Venerable Suk Kaithuean's *Matchima* meditation tradition. Then the book takes on a dominant image of Thai Theravāda Buddhism as being "monolithic." Patrick argues that this dominant image is created and perpetuated in works by major scholars who mostly dealt with the structural development of the Thai sangha in the past century, especially since the centralization of the Thai bureaucracy during the Reign of King Rama V. Patrick's book attempts to bring forth a more dynamic picture of Thai Theravāda Buddhism, with his research on the "living" tradition of Venerable Suk's *Matchima* meditation. The following two chapters deal with the English translation of the manuscript of Venerable Suk's meditation text, connecting it with previous scholars' explanation of this meditation as an expression of the *Yogāvacara*

tradition; while at the same time demonstrating with first hand experience, in what ways the tradition is still very much alive. The last two chapters deal with a comparison of this living tradition with the ancient manuscript and discuss the philosophical implications and the historical context of this particular meditation tradition.

In my view the greatest challenge for the researcher and the most significant contributions of this volume are the synthetic nature of this book. This book "weaves" together a good literature review of existing forms of meditation traditions in contemporary Thailand, a careful reading of the manuscript of the meditation text, a personal experience as a practitioner of this meditation with Luang Pho Wira, the present meditation master himself, as well as interviews with other practitioners attending the Wat Ratchasittharam Temple in Thonburi. With clarity of thought and well-argued presentation of the relevant materials, Patrick has given the readers a well-rounded picture of this living meditation tradition, its strengths and weaknesses. I believe this book sets a landmark in the research in the *Matchima* meditation tradition in Thailand. One of the most intriguing findings of this book is the author's analysis of Venerable Suk's unusual achievements as a meditation master, a Supreme Patriarch, and a highly respected monk whose meditation techniques, although not as well known as some other meditation traditions, have been transmitted at least for more than a century in Thailand.

It was exciting for me to read the data and analysis of Patrick's book about Venerable Suk's great achievements as a "lineage bearer, a spiritual and temporal charismatic leader and a teacher of renown individuals, including Kings Rama I, II, III and IV, and Somdet Phra Phuttachan To Phromrangsi (1788-1872). It seems to me in the long history of Thai Buddhism, a great monk can truly be great if (and only if?) he commands a well-balanced combination of these three components. He

needs to be a "true" bearer of the lineage of the great Buddhist tradition, he needs to reach highest spiritual achievement through strenuous efforts, he needs to bestow great benefits to the people, and he needs to have renown and influential students. Is it too far-fetched to claim that Buddhism becomes "Thai" through this process?

Patrick Ong's book demonstrates this process.

Suwanna Satha-Anand, Ph.D.
Philosophy Department
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok
October 20, 2013

Abstract

This book explores the history and practice of the *Matchima* meditation system currently taught at Wat Ratchasittharam. Practitioners claim that it is a system passed down by Venerable Suk Kaithuean who was the fourth Supreme Patriarch (Sangharat) of the Bangkok era (1819-1822). The research focused on five main themes comprising of physical space, perceptions of history, philosophy, pedagogical methods and the perspectives of the practitioners with the aim of obtaining a holistic understanding of this meditation system. By examining the differences and commonalities between the manuscript, which the Venerable Suk had inherited and had based his teachings on, and the living *Matchima* tradition now taught at the temple, this book reveals that the *Matchima* meditation system, was once part of an ancient meditation tradition, which had evolved over time to fit the needs of a changing Thai society. However, despite its adaptation, it still retains certain esoteric practices that set it apart from contemporary meditation systems. The book also claims that despite popular conceptions of a monolithic and inflexible Theravāda Buddhism that was believed to have been institutionalized since the fourth reign, the *Matchima* meditation system represents an aspect of Theravāda spiritual practice that is constantly evolving, adapting itself and has even contributed to the rise of other meditation traditions. This proves that Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand, when viewed from a different lens is actually more flexible, dynamic and multifaceted than previously conceived.

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Notes on language

There is generally no agreed system for transcribing Thai words using the Roman alphabet. The standard used in this book is based on the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS) from the Royal institute.[1] As for Pali terms, I have included diacritical marks whenever possible. All non-English terms, such as Pali and Thai words are italicized throughout the book with the exception of names pertaining to prominent individuals, titles, places, institutions, temples and dynasties.[2] Foreign terms that have found their way into the English dictionary such as Buddha and Theravāda will also not be italicized. The exception is when the word Buddha appears as a conglomerate such as *Buddha*, *Saṅgha*, *Dhamma,* often taken to mean the triple gem.

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[1] Although this system does not mark tones and vowel lengths are not distinguished, it is used in road signs and government publications, and is the closest thing to a standard of transcription for Thai. Refer to Wikipedia's page on the Royal Thai General System of Transcription: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Thai_General_System_of_Transcription [2010, 10 September].

[2] An example will be Wat Dhammakāya, which will not be italicized, in contrast to *Dhammakāya* meditation, which is italicized.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Thai Studies Department of Chulalongkorn University for accepting me as a Master's student. Similarly. With a Masters degree from Chulalongkorn University and an enhanced proficiency in the Thai language, I hope to contribute towards forging better and stronger ties between Singapore and Thailand in the course of my work at the Singapore civil service.

I am deeply grateful to my mum and dad and my sister who have been supportive of my decision to undertake a no-pay sabbatical for two and half years in order to pursue my dream of doing research work in Thailand. I am also indebted to my grandfather Keith Tan Kia Fatt and Phra Terry Magness for laying the foundation of my interest in Buddhist meditation. I am grateful to the emotional and spiritual support of my Reiki teacher, Corrine Brown. My journey in Thailand would not have been possible if not for Ajarn Titima Suthiwan who laid the foundation for my Thai language skills.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to my two supervisors, Dr Suwanna Satha-Anand and Dr Mano Mettanando Laohavanich for their guidance, sharing of knowledge and comments concerning my research topic. I am also indebted to Dr Nicola Tannenbaum for her advice, suggestions and comments on my term paper, which dealt with preliminary research findings related to my thesis. Special thanks to Dr Peter Skilling for reading and providing useful comments to the first draft of my book. I am also grateful for the friendship and assistance from Dr Natayada Na Songkhla, Dr Arthid Sheravanichkul and Dr Potprecha Cholvijarn who provided me with reading material and information about Buddhist philosophy during our discussions over lunch and dinners.

Lastly, but most importantly, I would like to thank the universe, my spiritual guides, angels and Ascended Masters who have continuously watched over me and provided me with many synchronicities and miracles of healing that have facilitated my journey towards achieving my goal and fulfilling my destiny in the 'land of beautiful people' (Thailand).

Preface

This book is based on my Master's dissertation, 'The Meditation System of the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuean as a Living Tradition at Wat Ratchasittharam', which I completed and submitted in the year 2011 as a requirement for obtaining a Master's degree in Thai Studies from Chulalongkorn University. In essence, it examines the origins, history, propagation, evolution and development of this ancient meditation system, which was popular in Bangkok about two hundred years ago, but is now taught only at one temple, Wat Ratchasittharam. Before examining each of the chapters briefly, I would like to provide a background to the reasons why I undertook this research topic.

Thirteen years ago, I read an inspirational book written by Kamala Tiyavanich in which she re-examined the forest tradition of the famous meditation master, Ajarn Mun and his lineage of disciples. Her book depicts them as courageously braving all kinds of fears in an attempt to gain insight. More importantly, she placed them in the context of what she referred to as 'Modern State Buddhism'. This interpretation of Buddhism originated from Bangkok and eventually imposed what it deemed as Buddhist 'orthodoxy' in terms of adherence to monastic rules, practices and selected scripture, unseen before in regions that now make up the Thai nation-state.

In her book, 'Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand',[1] she relied not just on secondary sources and autobiographical accounts, but also adopted an anthropological approach where she interviewed elderly monks and laity who knew them in order to construct an understanding of the

[1] Kamala Tiyavanich. *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

diversity of the various practices of 'Buddhisms' that existed before the rise of the Thai nation-state. This was considered a revolutionary approach, resulting in her advisor, Cornell University professor, David Wyatt commenting that her work has caused him to think everything he had known about a subject to be 'thrown away and rethought'.[2]

This was because previous scholars had interpreted Buddhism in Thailand based on a simple dichotomy of *Mahanikay* and *Thammayut* or the categories of meditation and administrative monks. For instance, reputable academics such as Stanley Tambiah, in his book, 'The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of the Amulets',[3] analyzed the life of Ajarn Mun and his disciples mainly from a textual perspective, such as how closely they had adhered to the rules and standards of the canonical scriptures, and to what extent their lives had been perceived as following the paradigm of the Buddha as opposed to how their actions were also driven by the regional and cultural contexts from which they had emerged. Tiyavanich's subsequent works such as 'The Buddha in the Jungle'[4] and the 'Sons of the Buddha'[5] have continued to emphasize the diversity of practices and local traditions that had existed amongst different monastic lineages that were transmitted primarily from master to disciple, and how these practices differed from the manner in which Buddhism is conceived in Thailand today. In her work, she has urged the need for more studies of these local traditions, which are sensitive to multiple dimensions and rooted in local histories.[6]

---

[2] Tiyavanich 1997: Forward (xi).

[3] S.J Tambiah. *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of the Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism and Millennial Buddhism.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

[4] Kamala Tiyavanich 2003: *The Buddha in the Jungle.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

[5] Kamala Tiyavanich 2007: *The Sons of the Buddha.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

[6] Tiyavanich 1997: p. 296.

Inspired by her research work, I was determined to answer this call to contribute to the understanding of some of these localized 'Buddhisms' through my post-graduate research.

Besides Kamala, there has been some mention in academic literature about the presence of pre-modern Buddhist practices existing in Mainland Southeast Asia and the need to provide alternative interpretations into how they should be understood.

Since the 1970s, one academic who devoted much of his attention to understanding these forms of Buddhisms was François Bizot who coined the term Tantric Theravāda Buddhism after examining evidence based on archeological finds, oral accounts and analysis of ancient manuscripts in Cambodia. His works have unfortunately not received much attention as they were written in French, and thus inaccessible to many researchers relying mainly on English sources. Kate Crosby, in her article 'Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay in the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the *Yogāvacara* Tradition'[7] has tried to highlight the need for more academic attention in this field of study by summarizing Bizot's work as well as others who have researched into aspects of spiritual practices that existed before the establishment of state Buddhism. Crosby defines these practices as conforming to Bizot's definition of Tantric Theravāda. She however uses the term the *Yogāvacara* tradition and lists a set of common criteria that unifies these practices despite their diversity and the fact that they could be found in several disparate locations in mainland Southeast Asia. Besides Crosby, another academic,

[7] Kate Crosby. Tantric Theravada: A bibliographical essay on the writings of François Bizot and others on the Yogāvacara tradition, *Contemporary Buddhism* 1:2 (November 2000): pp. 141-198.

L.S. Cousins in his article, 'Aspects of Esoteric Southern Buddhism',[8] has made references to Bizot's work in examining the notion of Tantric Theravāda, which he calls esoteric Buddhism. Cousins also tries to determine its origins by examining five different possibilities that range from Mahayana influences, Saivite traditions in Cambodia, a product of localization and various influences from Sri Lanka.

My interest in examining the meditation system inherited and propagated by the Venerable Suk Kaithuean was inspired by a class conducted by Dr Mano.[9] He gave a lecture on the various schools of meditation in Thailand and touched on the Venerable Suk's system of meditation. What captivated me were the techniques and the processes used by this school of healing that would be considered unusual in contemporary Buddhist meditation teachings today. Most contemporary meditation schools would make the association between the practice of meditation and how it's scientifically proven to benefit mental and physical health. For instance, there has been research conducted in the west regarding the employment of *Vipassanā* meditation in treating depression and drug addiction as it cultivates mental strength, resilience and personal empowerment over one's problems and addictions via the cultivation of mindfulness.[10] Buddhadāsa in his meditation handbook commented that controlling one's breathing would benefit the nervous system and reduce the acidic content of the body. It is this acidic content, produced by 'violent' emotions, which is responsible for many physical ailments resulting in the need for medication. An individual apt in meditation would not rely solely on

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[8] L.S Cousins. Aspects of Esoteric Southern Buddhism. In Peter Connolly (ed.), *Indian Insights: Buddhism, Brahmanism and Bhakti*, pp. 185-207. London: Luzac Oriental, 1997.

[9] Dr Mano Mettanando Laohavanich is currently a researcher at the Pridi Banomyong International College, Thammasat University.

[10] Refer to the paper written by Michael S. Drummond, Vipassana Meditation and Addiction Therapy: *Some Observations on the Addiction Therapy Center START AGAIN of Zurich*, Switzerland (2001) and Orawan Pilunowad, *Different Versions of Buddhist Meditation: Integrative Apparatus for Mental Health Development in Thailand* (1999). See references for more details.

allopathic means of medication, but would train his mind in order to achieve a healthy body.[11]

In contrast, the meditation system taught by the Venerable Suk reminded me of metaphysical healing methods that utilize points or bases believed to be located vertically along the physical body (I will deal more about this topic in chapter 4). This form of treatment, in contrast to the teachings of contemporary meditation methods, is not verifiable by science. Being a practitioner of similar metaphysical and holistic healing techniques myself, I was naturally drawn to this subject.[12]

Another reason for my interest in this meditation system was Dr Mano's suggestion that it was perhaps one of the oldest surviving meditation systems in Thailand. In his class, he mentioned that the healing modality of the system was most likely practiced by forest ascetics before the arrival of Theravāda Buddhist meditation methods from Sri Lanka.

I later learnt that Dr Mano had examined this meditation system in his translation of the manuscript of the Venerable Suk for his doctoral dissertation, 'Meditation and Healing in the Theravāda Buddhist Order of Thailand and Laos'.[13] I became more interested in the topic when I learnt that this technique could have been a possible predecessor for *Dhammakāya* meditation, a meditation system 're-discovered' by one of Thailand's most esteemed monks, Luang Po Sot. This was suggested by Catherine Sarah Newell in her PHD thesis, 'Monks, meditation and

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[11] Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu: 2003, p. 58.

[12] I have been a practitioner and qualified teacher of Reiki (a Japanese healing art) for the past few years. Since June 2011, I have begun teaching this holistic healing therapy to the Thai people in Bangkok.

[13] Mettanando Bhikkhu. *Meditation and Healing in the Theravada Buddhist Order of Thailand and Laos*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of Hamburg, 1998.

missing links: continuity, 'orthodoxy' and the *Vijja Dhammakāya* in Thai Buddhism'.[14]In her thesis, Newell examines the philosophy and teachings of *Dhammakāya* meditation, and its significance in Thailand. She claims that one should not see it as a monolithic movement espoused by Wat Dhammakāya, but that it comprises of several lineages each having its own following, distinctive means of propagation and interpretation of the system. With help from Dr Mano's thesis, she tried to examine the precursors to *Dhammakāya* meditation, which she claims were within the sphere of the *Yogāvacara* tradition and thus an indigenous product of the region.

I have always been fascinated by the subject of *Dhammakāya* meditation, having done my bachelor's thesis, 'In Search of the *Dhammakāya*'[15] ten years ago, by examining four different lineages that emerged after the passing of Luang Pho Sot. Prior to my knowledge of the recent literature which existed on the subject, I have often wondered about the possible origins of *Dhammakāya* meditation. With my recent discovery of the *Yogāvacara* tradition and that the meditation system of the Venerable Suk, is conceived as a possible facet of this ancient tradition, I decided to undertake it as a research topic for my Master's thesis. It is a topic, which I have waited for the past ten years to accomplish.

---

[14] Catherine Sarah Newell. *Monks. Meditation and Missing Links: Continuity, 'Orthodoxy' and the Vijja Dhammakaya in Thai Buddhism.* Doctoral dissertation, Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2008.

[15] Patrick Ong. *In Search of the Dhammakāya,* Bachelor's Thesis (Honours), Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, National University of Singapore, 2001.

Chapter 1 provides a brief historical background to the Venerable Suk and the propagation of his distinctive style of meditation. It also touches on the aims of my research, methodology and its significance in contributing to the holistic understanding of Buddhism in Thailand. Chapter 2 looks at the different contemporary meditation traditions popular in Thailand today. It provides an overview of the philosophy behind their practice and what common features they share that makes them distinctive as a modern phenomena.

Chapter 3 examines the discourse surrounding the creation of 'monolithic' Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand. By examining the historical and political circumstances behind its creation, the reader is given insight into its actual nature with the conclusion that it does not encompass every aspect of Thai Buddhist practice in the country. Chapter 4 studies the manuscript that was inherited by the Venerable Suk, its main features and analyses it in the context of the *Yogāvacara* tradition.

Chapter 5 looks at the living tradition of this meditation system now known as *Matchima* meditation taught at Wat Ratchasittharam. This is done in four facets namely; physical space, perceptions of history, the philosophy, pedagogical methods and the perspectives of the practitioners themselves. Chapter 6 compares the similarities and differences between the teachings recorded in manuscript with the living tradition.

Chapter 7 examines the philosophical implications of the *Matchima* meditation system for Buddhist practice in Thailand and attempts to place the meditation system passed down by the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuean in its proper historical context.

The objective of this book, besides providing an insightful study into an ancient meditation system, aims to provide a revelation into the multifaceted nature of Theravāda Buddhist practice in Thailand and dispel common notions held by many academics that Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand since the fourth reign has become inflexible and monolithic.

1

Introduction, Research Aims and Significance

In 1767, Burmese armies invaded the ancient Thai capital of Ayutthaya. They ransacked and pillaged villages, temples and palaces that had existed for centuries. Due to the massive wave of destruction that accompanied their campaign, the inhabitants of Ayutthaya and the surrounding villages fled to neighboring towns and villages.

One of the inhabitants who had escaped into the forest was a monk named Venerable Suk (1733-1822). Besides fleeing from the onslaught of the Burmese army, his retreat provided the perfect opportunity to undertake the practice of *dhutanga* (Thai: *thudong*) in the forests of mainland Southeast Asia. *Dhutanga* was a popular ascetic practice conducted by forest monks during intermittent periods of their monastic career where they would wander deep into the forests with the aim of putting the teachings of the Buddha into practice as well as visiting sacred sites. It is said that Venerable Suk undertook his forest pilgrimage with the intention of developing himself spiritually via meditational techniques inherited from his forest monk lineage.[1]

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[1] Forest monks have been historically known as *Aranyawaasii* (Pali: *arañña*vāsin) while their urban counterparts have been called *Khaamawaasii*. (Pali: gāmavāsin). Besides being known for their emphasis on meditation and using the forest as a training ground, they have also played an essential role serving as counter weights to the already established village/town dwelling monasteries. Academics such as Tambiah describes this as a triadic relationship in which forest monks residing in the peripheral reaches of the kingdom would be used by the ruling elite from time to time to 'purify' the town-dwelling established saṅgha. See Tambiah 1984: pp.72-73.

While in his forties, during the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782), Venerable Suk ended his forest wanderings and settled down in Wat Thahoi. This temple was situated around the outskirts of the old capital. It seems that his spiritual practices while undertaking *dhutanga* bore fruit as the energy generated from his loving-kindness meditation attracted fowls residing deep within the forest to dwell around him and his residence.[2] As his fame started to grow, he was often referred to as *Suk Kaithuean* (สุก ไก่เถื่อน) roughly meaning 'wild chicken' Suk.[3]

The early rulers of the Bangkok era (founded in 1768) who were collectively establishing the foundations of the new capital at Bangkok were aware of the prestige and spiritual acumen of this monk. They saw his potential for contributing to the establishment of the new capital. As such, these kings tried various means to 'tame' this 'wild chicken' and harness his charisma, which was believed to derive from an interpretation of Buddhist practice considered authentic and commonly practiced during the time of Ayutthaya.

For instance, King Rama I invited him to reside at Wat Phlab, now known as Wat Ratchasittharam and appointed him the head of meditation instruction (1782). During the second reign, he was appointed the Supreme Patriarch (1819). In addition, he was also the preceptor and meditation instructor to the young princes Jessadabodindra and Mongkut, who eventually became King Rama III and King Rama IV respectively.[4] During the reign of King Rama II, Venerable Suk's system of meditation was promoted as the main medium of instruction to the monastic community in the kingdom. This

[2] Mettanando 1998: p. 19.

[3] Mettanando 1998: pp. 20-23.

[4] Newell 2008: pp. 183-184.

occurred during a monastic conference convened by the King in 1821, where he was appointed head of the council.[5] The importance of Venerable Suk's role and contributions to the establishment of the early Bangkok period thus should not be underestimated.

Two hundred years later, the meditation system, which the Venerable Suk inherited and taught, can hardly be found in the modern Thai nation-state. Fortunately, Venerable Suk had in his possession records of this meditation system in the form of *samut khoi* (สมุดข่อย), a traditional Thai folded manuscript book.[6] These spiritual practices were based an accumulation of knowledge collected over many centuries, transmitted via a lineage of teachers. The need to record this tradition in a manuscript was due to the perceived threat of its extinction, since the Burmese invasion had resulted in the decimation of many temples and libraries in Ayutthaya.[7]

Far from being an extinct tradition, this meditation system is still taught at Wat Ratchasittharam today. Practitioners today refer to it as the *Matchima* (มัชฌิมา) meditation system.

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[5] วีระ ฐานวีโร, พระครูสังฆรักษ์ 2549: คำนำ (Wira Thanwiro, Phra Khru Sangkarak: 2549 BE, Forward)

[6] The Manuscript has been translated into English by Dr Mano (Mettanando) as part of this doctoral dissertation, *Meditation and Healing in the Theravāda Buddhist Order of Thailand and Laos*. Department of Philosophy, University of Hamburg, 1998.

[7] Newell 2008: pp. 160.

Objectives, methodology and hypothesis

This book seeks to provide an in-depth study of the *Matchima* meditation system. It is based on teachings derived from the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuean and currently taught at Wat Ratchasittharam. My study seeks to examine the history and practice of this meditation system and also explore its continuation and development. This is achieved by examining the differences and commonalities between the original manuscript of the Venerable Suk and the current practices of the followers at the temple. Such an approach will provide an understanding into how the meditation system has evolved and what insight can be gained from this.

To achieve this, my research weaves together a combination of textual and field resources. By utilizing these two approaches, the book seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of this ancient practice.

Textual research deals with existing academic literature written about the *Matchima* meditation system. This is derived from two main sources, namely, 'Meditation and Healing in the Theravāda Buddhist Order of Thailand and Laos' by Mettanando Bhikkhu[8] and 'Monks, Meditation and Missing Links: Continuity, 'Orthodoxy' and the *Vijja Dhammakāya* in Thai Buddhism' by Catherine Sarah Newell. I also examine books and publications produced by the temple.

As for field research, I made myself a disciple of the meditation teacher of the temple, Luang Pho Wira (หลวงพ่อวีระ). My initiation as a disciple

[8] At the time this dissertation was written, Dr Mano was an ordained monk who had served under Wat Dhammakāya. He is now a layman, known as Mano Mettanando Laohavanich and is currently a researcher at the Pridi Banomyong International College, Thammasat University.

commenced since 28 July 2010 and I have made regular trips (average of three times a week, for about three hours) to the temple for meditation practice and fieldwork. As a participant of the *Matchima* meditation system and an analytical observer, my intention was to understand how the meditation is currently taught today from an insider's perspective. I also conducted interviews with lay and monastic practitioners to understand how they themselves view this meditation system.

Prior to undertaking this research, I devised a set of questions to facilitate the collection of data and information I considered pertinent to this research. Some of these questions include the following:

- What is the meditation system like in terms of its philosophy, techniques and how is it currently practiced?
- Who are the practitioners? How did they come into contact with it? What are their perceptions about it?
- What is the discourse used by the practitioners in justifying their commitment to the practice and how do they see it vis-à-vis other contemporary meditation systems in Thailand?
- What distinctive features does this meditation system possess which makes it different from other contemporary meditation systems?
- By comparing the teachings taught at the temple today with those contained in Venerable Suk's manuscript, to what extent has the meditation system evolved? Why and for what purpose?
- Is the tradition in danger of dying out or does it continue to have a niche in Thai society today?

From analyzing the data collected, I argue that the meditation system passed down by the Venerable Suk and taught at Wat Ratchasittharam today has

adapted to fit the needs of a changing Thai society. In addition, I also claim that despite conceptions of a monolithic 'orthodox' Theravāda Buddhism argued by academics to have arisen since the fourth reign, there exists the continuation of an ancient spiritual practice known as the *Yogāvacara* tradition, which has survived into modern times and has contributed to the development of other distinctive meditation traditions in Thailand.

These two arguments demonstrate that the nature of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand is more dynamic, inclusive and multifaceted than previously thought.

Significance of Research

The *Yogāvacara* tradition is a relatively new field in the study of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. By conducting research into the meditation system passed down by Venerable Suk, I hope to contribute to this emerging field.

Existing research about Venerable Suk's system of meditation mainly focused on analyzing the manuscript that was passed down by the meditation master, as done by Dr Mano and some preliminary field-work by Catherine Newell as part of her doctoral dissertation on *Dhammakāya* meditation. Newell had only attempted the meditation once at Wat Ratchasittharam. For my own research, I studied this meditation system, as a living tradition with myself as a participant and an analytical observer. This has not been attempted before. In addition, a more comprehensive understanding of the Venerable Suk's meditation system would enable a re-examination of earlier suggestions by some academics that it is part of a broader *Yogāvacara* tradition in mainland Southeast Asia.

With the proliferation of many other contemporary meditation techniques popular in Thailand today, it would be interesting to examine how and why this ancient tradition has survived into the twenty-first century and how perceptions of Buddhist practice such as meditation, transmission of teachings and what is considered 'orthodox' on the whole have evolved in Thailand from ancient to modern times.

2

Contemporary Meditation Movements in Thailand

Introduction

Meditation in Buddhism is an exercise that is part of a wider set of practices covered under the noble eight-fold path. The Buddha expounded this path as the only means for one to achieve liberation from samsaric existence and suffering. It is observed that despite the wealth of information about meditation mentioned in the scriptures, there is ambiguity about how it should be carried out. This is specifically seen in the notion of how much tranquility or concentration (*samatha*) to undertake before proceeding to insight (*vipassanā*). In contemporary Thailand, this has led to a variety of meditation practices and techniques all claiming to be the 'right' method taught by the Buddha.

In this chapter, I will examine meditation movements that are popular in Thailand today. It is observed that despite differences in the techniques and interpretations of how Buddhist meditation should be performed, these mainstream movements share certain commonalities, which I will identify for the purpose of my analysis.

Background to meditation in Buddhist practice

In contrast to popular notions of meditation as merely a relaxation technique, meditation in the Buddhist context has the connotation of 'cultivation' or bringing into being, reflected in the Pali word *bhāvanā.* Buddhist meditation is not

mere desultory reflection, but a severe exercise in attention, discipline of will and mind, and concentration of thought.[1] This practice necessitates spiritual and mental exercises aimed at developing wholesome mental states that conduce to the realization of the Buddhist path.[2] The practice of meditation in Buddhism not only entails sitting upright in the lotus position while looking serene, as depicted frequently in movies, but is part of a holistic practice aimed at purifying defilements lurking in the mind and manifested in one's external actions.

Meditation is where one puts into practice the theoretical knowledge encapsulated in the scriptures. In Thailand, it is referred to as *pathibat* (Pali: *paṭipatti*) or practice as opposed to *pariyat* (Pali: *pariyatti*), scriptural studies. As a living tradition, there are variations as to how it is performed. This is seen especially in Thailand.

(In Appendix A, The philosophy of Buddhist meditation, I provide more information about this subject).

The forest monk tradition of Ajarn Mun and his lineage

Background

The tradition of Ajarn Mun and his lineage can be said to be a late nineteen century/early twentieth century revival. It was a reaction towards the increasing trend among the saṅgha that was directed towards textual study rather than practice. Some monks such as Ajarn Mun believed that this compromised the

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[1] Magness (*Vistas- Buddhist Insights into Immortality*) 2007: p 5. Retrieved from website: http://www.triple-gem.net/BookList.html [2010, 25 December].

[2] Gethin 1998: p. 174.

original ideals of monastic life. The establishment of his distinctive forest tradition thus focuses on the practice of meditation derived strictly from the canonical scriptures.[3]

Born in 1871 in the Northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani, Ajarn Mun was initially ordained in the Lao tradition in 1893. He re-ordained in the *Thammayut* order later as he believed that this sect, with its strict adherence on the *vinaya* was the most supportive structure for monks intending to follow the 'correct' monastic discipline.[4] After his re-ordination, Ajarn Mun trained under a notable meditation master, also under the *Thammayut* order by the name of Ajarn Sao. He subsequently embarked on his solitary forest wanderings, using the wilderness as his teacher and a natural training ground. Along the way, he acquired several disciples whom he instructed based on his experiences in the forest. This resulted in the development of the meditation lineage that was started by Ajarn Mun.

The main difference between the forest tradition of Ajarn Mun and the forest monks in the past was the emphasis of Ajarn Mun's tradition on the monk's discipline. Before this, the various schools of forest monks in Thailand did not emphasize much on adhering to the discipline of the *vinaya* because they did not possess the texts and the books.[5] It was with the establishment of the *Thammayut*

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[3] Information obtained from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_Forest_Tradition [2011, 15 January].

[4] Taylor 1993: p. 298.

[5] This claim was extracted from a video recorded and published by Dhammatube concerning the biography of Ajarn Chah under the chapter, 'The history of the forest tradition'. It was based on an interview conducted with Ajarn Jayasaro. He is an English disciple of Ajarn Chah who was one of the first generation disciples of Ajarn Mun. The video series can be found in http://www. Ajarnahnchah.org/videos.htm [2011, 16 January].

reform under King Mongkut that canonical materials were made readily available not just for recitation, but to understand its true meaning.[6]

The return back to what was perceived to be 'correct' Buddhism in terms of proper practice was one of the main elements of Ajarn Mun's meditation movement.

There has been extensive academic research conducted on Ajarn Mun's forest monk tradition, its relationship to the saṅgha authority in Bangkok and the rise of the Thai nation state. Some notable examples are Tambiah's 'The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of the Amulets'[7], Taylor's 'Forest Monks and the Nation-State'[8] and Kamala Tiyavanich's 'Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand'[9].

Meditation Teachings

This forest tradition is not clearly identified with any one particular meditation method. This was because Ajarn Mun's teachings were uniquely tailored for each disciple.[10] Despite his personalized style, certain aspects of meditation tend

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[6] Claim made by Ajarn Jayasaro in http://www.Ajarnahnchah.org/videos.htm [2011, 16 January]. This was also mentioned by Taylor who claimed that the forest monks under Ajarn Mun followed a more detailed interpretation of the *vinaya* known as the *Buphasikkhaawannanaa*, which was the model, used by Prince Wachirayan for forming his more comprehensible *Winaimuk* text. Taylor mentions that the monks found the *Winaimuk* texts too 'modernist' for their own standards. Taylor 1993: p. 135.

[7] S.J. Tambiah. *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of the Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism and Millennial Buddhism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

[8] J.L. Taylor. *Forest Monks and the Nation-State: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeastern Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993.

[9] Kamala Tiyavanich. *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

[10] Maha Boowa 2005: pp. 9, 21, 66, 67.

to be emphasized. These aspects are mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*), the recitation of the *buddho* mantra which is a kind of *anussati* or recollection of the qualities of the Buddha, the development of the *jhāna* or the attainment of concentration (*appanā samādhi*) and the contemplation of the body (*kāya-gatā-sati*).[11]

This tradition stresses the inseparability of *sila*, *samādhi* and *paññā* being supporting factors for each other in following the eight-fold path. One aspect of this forest tradition is seen in the case of Ajarn Chah's teachings. Ajarn Chah criticizes meditation systems that do not emphasize *samādhi* but jump straight into *vipassanā*, claiming that it is sloppy practice.[12] His disciple, Ajarn Brahmavamso compares it to the front and back of a hand, meaning they are inseparable. To him, right concentration '*sammā samādhi*' means *jhāna*.[13]

In a meditation handbook entitled 'The Basic Method of Meditation and the *Jhānas*', Ajarn Brahmavamso provides step-by-step instructions on how to conduct meditation and information on the different stages experienced by basic and advanced practitioners.[14] Advice is given on how to overcome obstacles and pitfalls in one's practice, making it possible to use the book as a guide in the comfort of one's home. In the aspect of meditation instruction, the practitioner is first advised to focus his attention on the breath so as to be in the present moment. This proceeds to what is known as the 'beautiful breath' where the practitioner's mind experiences peace, freedom and bliss. The sensations on breathing eventually

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[11] Nissara Horayangura, *Ajarn Chah* (undated & unpublished article).

[12] Nissara Horayangura, *Ajarn Chah* (undated & unpublished article).

[13] Shankman 2008: p. 171.

[14] See Ajahn Brahmavamso. *The Basic Method of Meditation and the Jhanas.* Singapore: Buddhist Fellowship of Singapore, undated publication.

disappear when the mind takes itself as its own object.[15] At this stage, a *nimit* (Pali: *nimitta*) or vision appears and different practitioners have different visions depending on their individual characteristics. Focusing on the center of the *nimit* enables the practitioner to enter the *jhānas* in successive progression depending on their aptitude.

In this handbook, the practitioner is encouraged to read about the various stages and experiences encountered even though he or she may not have attained it yet. It is argued that having prior knowledge of what to expect can enable the practitioners to access which stage or level they are at by matching personal experience to what is written in the handbook. As such, the handbook is described as a useful 'road map' for individual practice.

Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation

Background

This meditation system was founded by the Burmese monk, Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1982). It is often referred to in Thailand as the *yup noh phong noh* method or simply as *Vipassanā*. The method was introduced into Thailand in 1952 through the efforts of Phra Phimontham[16] (1903-1989), abbot of Wat Mahathat.[17]

This system claims to follow the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta* and was seen as conforming to the 'correct' teachings of the Buddha due to its strict, literal

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[15] At this point, the external senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch are completely absent.

[16] Also referred to as Somdet Phra Phuthachan or At Atsapha.

[17] He was also a scholar and high ranking monk – the saṅgha minister of the interior under the saṅgha act 1941.

adherence with scripture. Zar Zar Min Thaw's research indicates that this was not only the view of the clergy who promoted it, but was also a perception shared amongst Thai laity practicing the technique.[18]

This meditation system was perceived as relatively simple to perform compared to the traditional meditational methods existing in Thailand that were heavily laden with ritual and considered complex. This was recognized by Phra Phimontham who felt the need to make Buddhism more relevant for the increasing number of Thai urbanites who were losing interest in the religion. The promotion of *Vipassanā* would be easy and useful for them.[19] It has also been suggested that the promotion of Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation in the 1950s reflected an attempt by the *Mahanikay* order in gaining more lay support over the royally supported *Thammayut* order.[20]

From Wat Mahathat, this meditation system was propagated to the rest of the Thai provinces via a network of *Mahanikay* temples. It was promoted as a method where it would be possible for individuals to see results very quickly whether they were living as monks, novices or laypeople with different demands on their time.[21]

Unlike Ajarn Mun's forest tradition and *Dhammakāya* meditation, there has not been much academic research conducted on the societal impacts of *Vipassanā* meditation in Thailand. Much literature dealing with this meditation movement focuses mainly on the technique and its philosophy. In the past few decades, most academics would make passing reference to *Vipassanā* meditation

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[18] Zar Zar 2009: pp. 36, 91-96.

[19] Tiyavanich 1997: pp. 227-228.

[20] Tiyavanich 1997: pp. 226-229.

[21] Newell 2008: p. 225.

while their primary focus was on other meditation movements. This was particularly seen in Kamala Tiyavanich's 'Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand'.[22] In recent years, new works analyzing the impact of the *Vipassanā* meditation movement in Thailand has emerged, examples are Zar Zar Min Thaw's Master's thesis, 'Mahasi Sayadaw Meditation Practice in Thai Society',[23] Potprecha Cholvijarn's article, '*Yup no phong no* (rise and fall) Meditation Method'[24] and Joanna Cook's, 'Meditation in Modern Buddhism'.[25] The latter's published book deals with the popularity of the Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation in Thai society, with focus on its impact in a particular temple based on her field research. She claims that the adoption and practice of the Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation has resulted in the blurring of some boundaries between clergy, *maechis* and the laity.

Meditation teachings

It is often described as a bare insight meditation method since it does not emphasize *samādhi* as a necessary prerequisite. The *Vipassanā* system emphasizes that the meditator must observe the air element and not simply follow the breath. This is unlike other traditional meditation systems, which utilize the breath as a means of achieving one-pointed focus. In this method, one observes the rise and fall of the abdomen as a starting point. According to Mahasi Sayadaw, the average practitioner finds it easier to note the manifestation of the element of motion using

[22] Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

[23] Zar Zar Min Thaw. *Mahasi Sayadaw Meditation Practice in Thai Society.* Master's thesis, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2009.

[24] Potprecha Cholvijarn. *Yup No Phong No (rise and fall) Meditation Method.* unpublished and undated article.

[25] Joanna Cook. *Meditation in Modern Buddhism-Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

this method.[26] In Thailand, the noting of this rising and falling is accompanied by the word '*noh*' (which sounds like a 'nor' rising tone). This is why the technique is referred to as the '*yup Noh Phong Noh*' (Rise 'Nor' Fall 'Nor') method.[27]

Observing the movement of the air element represents the first of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which is the mindfulness of body, progressing later to the observation of feelings, mental and material phenomena that come to one's attention. The practice thus identifies itself closely with the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta*. Focused attention on the process of rising-falling brings forth insight, a quality which cannot be attained from reasoning or rationalizing alone. Insight is gained from contemplating the five grasping aggregates (*khandas*), which can be grouped as form (Body/Matter/Corporeality) and mind (Feeling, Perception, Volitional Activities, Consciousness). Mahasi taught that one identifies the five aggregates as self and bends towards them.[28] Thus, if the mind contemplates on this process of bending, then it would not cling and identify itself with them.

Practitioners argue that the level of concentration from noting the rising-falling in the abdomen is sufficient for the practice of insight. The employment of *samādhi* in the traditional way to attain the *jhānas* is a longer process and unnecessary. It is also associated with the attainment of supernatural powers and attachment to happiness that distracts one from the 'true path'.[29]

It is noted that the meditation centers teaching the Mahasi method have scheduled retreats that are especially tailored to meet the needs of the middle-class

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[26] Zar Zar 2009: p. 22.

[27] Potprecha Cholvijarn: *Yup No Phong No (rise and fall) Meditation Method.* Unpublished and undated article, p. 9.

[28] Potprecha Cholvijarn: *Yup No Phong No (rise and fall) Meditation Method.* Unpublished and undated article, p. 7.

[29] Zar Zar 2009: p. 36.

lifestyle.[30] There are intensive seven-month retreats for those who are able to afford the time to practice as seen in the case of Wat Vivekasorm and short retreats of around three days for busy executives who cannot afford extended period of leave from their companies. At Wat Mahathat, there are three allocated timings each day (morning/afternoon/evenings) catered for those who intend to walk in without prior appointment to participate in the chanting, meditation instruction and practice.

It seems that there are other smaller temples around Thailand, propagating this meditation method. In a small booklet produced by Wat Amphawan, meditation instructions based on the Mahasi method are included in a chapter.[31] The booklet deals with the making of merit and the responsibilities of children to parents and is produced for free distribution to the public. It is noted that the instructions have been made simple for the layperson to understand and only covers three pages. The goal of meditation is promoted as a means to make merit for oneself and useful for attaining peace, success at work and facilitating a good nights sleep.

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[30]These centers are Wat Mahathai (Bangkok) Wat Vivekasorm (Chonburi province), Dhammodaya Chanmyay Meditation Center (Nakorn Pathom) and The Young Buddhist Association of Thailand (YBAT) (Bangkok). For more information on these meditation centers teaching the Mahasi *Vipassanā* method. See Zar Zar 2009: pp. 43-72.

[31] Method of repaying one's debt to one's parents and the responsibilities of children, produced by Caran, Luang Pho (จรัญ, หลวงพ่อ. วิธีใช้หนี้พ่อแม่และหน้าที่ของเด็ก.), Wat Amphawan in 2010, p. 64-66.

Dhammakāya meditation

Background

Dhammakāya meditation is traced to one of Thailand's eminent monks, Luang Pho Sot.[32] He claimed that he had re-discovered the meditation system originally taught by the Buddha. Practitioners add that this system was lost as early as 500 years after the Buddha's passing and is the correct method of achieving insight and liberation.[33]

Various biographies claim that Luang Pho Sot was determined to uncover the truth of the Buddha's teachings. He attempted to translate the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta* as he believed that it contained information on true Buddhist practice.[34] Besides studying Pali for this purpose, he also saw the importance of understanding it based on meditative experience. As such, he visited different temples, and studied with several meditation masters. Wat Ratchasittharam is mentioned in one of his bibliographies, where he studied under Phra Sangavaranuwongse (Phra Ajarn Eam).[35]

Through several attempts, he succeeded in this goal when he experienced a revelation at Wat Bangkuvieng, Nonthaburi in the eleventh year of his ordination. This revelation gave him the assurance that the method he had uncovered based on interpretation and experience was the correct practice taught by the Buddha. His

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[32] Born Sodh Candassaro on 10 Oct 1884 (2427 BE) in Suphanburi province.

[33] Sermchai Jayamanggalo, Phra Maha 1997: Forward by Somdej Phra Maharajmangkalajahn.

[34] I use two biographies written about Luang Pho Sot. One by the *Dhammakāya* Foundation, *The life and times of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam* and the other by Phra Terry Magness, *The Life and Teaching of Chao Khun Mongkol-Thepmuni and The Dhammakāya*. Refer to the Bibliography for more details.

[35] *Dhammakāya* foundation 2000: p. 36.

sermons interpreted the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta* in a new light, where body in body, feeling in feeling, consciousness in consciousness and dhamma in dhamma is the result of the meditator progressing through a series of refined bodies.[36]

Luang Pho Sot systemized and taught this meditation system after he became abbot of Wat Paknam temple (1916) located at the Bhasicharoen district. The popularity of the temple and the meditation system increased due to the miracles that he performed and his close network of monks and *maechis* who used *Dhammakāya* meditation to provide spiritual healing to the laity.

There has already been extensive research conducted about *Dhammakāya* meditation, particularly the movement espoused by Wat Dhammakāya. Most scholarly works deal with the appeal of this movement to the Thai middle-class, the social and monastic structure of Wat Dhammakāya, and its comparisons with other Thai temples, and the temple's promotion of Buddhist consumerist practices. Examples include Jeffrey Bowers, '*Thammakaya* Meditation in Thai Society'[37], Roy Mackenzie's, 'New Buddhist Movements in Thailand'[38], Natayada Na Songkhla's, 'Style and Ascetics: Attractiveness, Power and the Thai saṅgha[39], and Rungrawee

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[36] Magness (*The Life and Times of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam*) 2007: p. 33. Retrieved from website: http://www.triple-gem.net/BookList.html [2010, 25 December].

[37] Jeffrey Bowers. *Thammakaya Meditation in Thai Society.* Master's Thesis, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1995.

[38] Roy Mackenzie. *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand.* London: Routledge, 2001.

[39] Natayada na Songkhla. *Style and Ascetics: Attractiveness, Power and the Thai saṅgha.* Doctoral dissertation, Department of the Study of Religions, Arts Faculty, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999.

Chalermsripinyorat's article, 'Doing the Business of Faith: The Capitalistic *Dhammakāya* Movement and the Spiritually-Thirsty Thai Middle Class'.[40]

Meditation teachings

Dhammakāya meditation advocates the need to envision a crystal light sphere two-finger breadths above the navel, commonly known as the seventh position.[41] For beginners, this is initially achieved via a step-by-step technique by visualizing a crystal sphere entering the body through a series of positions starting from outside the nostril to the final seventh position. Once the mind has rested at the final position, the combined use of the mantra '*samma araham*' which is a recollection of the Buddha (*anusatti*) and mindful breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*) is used as an anchor to ensure that the mind does not drift. By doing so, the practitioner hopes to progress through a series of eighteen bodies beginning from the coarse human state to what is known as the *Dhammakāya Arahatta* state.[42]

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[40] Rungrawee Chalermsripinyorat. Doing the Business of Faith: The Capitalistic Dhammakāya Movement and the Spiritually-Thirsty Thai Middle Class. Paper presented for *International Institute for Asian Studies*, 1999.

[41] Most centers teaching *Dhammakāya* meditation would refer to the seventh position as the center of the body. This is located two finger-breadths above the navel.

[42] The series of bodies that one envisions corresponds to beings that inhabit the worlds according to the cosmology of the *triphum* or the three worlds. This is seen from the human level to the *Arūpa Brahma* level. After transcending the *Arūpa Brahma* body, the meditator encounters a series of *Dhammakāya* Buddha bodies from the *Dhammakāya Gotrabhu* to the *Dhammakāya Arahatta*. The first eight forms constitute the crude human body to the refined *Arūpa Brahma* body. This is considered the domain of *samādhi*, while the next ten *Dhammakāya* bodies, starting with the *Gotrabhu* is where insight or *vipassanā* takes place. All practitioners aim to attain eighteenth body or the *Dhammakāya Arahatta* body, as this would entail full insight into the reality of existence in the samsaric world, which would facilitate their progression towards *nibbāna* in the future.

The rationale of this meditation system is based on the perception that embodying forms in increasing refinement enables the practitioner to increasingly perceive what is coarse, and defiled in the earlier bodies, thus assisting the progress towards the elimination of ignorance. As such, some prominent practitioners of this system would claim that mere mindfulness of one's body and actions while limited to the human level of consciousness (as observed in the Burmese *Vipassanā* system) would only result in emancipation from the human aggregates.[43] This is not sufficient, as there are 'subtler levels of a more insidious nature to be emancipated from.'[44]

Three main centers that continue to propagate *Dhammakāya* meditation are Wat Paknam (Thonburi), Wat Dhammakāya (Pathum Thani province) and Wat Luang Pho Sot (Rajburi province). These centers usually encourage group meditations. In the case of Wat Dhammakāya and Wat Luang Pho Sot, there are regular meditation retreats and gatherings throughout the year. These retreats cater to both Thais and foreigners. To some extent, this is due to the underlying belief that the energies generated from more people practicing the meditation at the same time could be used to counter the activities of the evil forces, personified as *mara*.[45]

In Wat Dhammakāya's website, meditation is promoted as a means to discover 'simplicity and inner peace'. This is also seen in the testimonials of foreigners who claim to have experienced the benefits in terms of better control of

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[43] This is probably a comment on other meditation systems that existed at a similar time such as the Burmese *Vipassanā* method, which does not focus on *samādhi* and attempts to conduct mindfulness of the body and other phenomena immediately.

[44] Magness (*Vistas- Buddhist Inisghts into Immortality*) 2007: pg. 24. Retrieved from website: http://www.triple-gem.net/Booklist.html [2010, 15 December]

their emotions and being able to handle the stresses of everyday life.[46]At Wat Luang Pho Sot, ascending through the eighteen bodies is promoted as an achievable feat. Visitors were even told that previous participants were able to accomplish this in a 'fortnight'.[47] The temple website also features testimonials by westerners who were successful and were able to visit *nibbāna* and the various planes of existence within a few weeks.[48]

For all the centers, particularly Wat Dhammakāya and Wat Luang Pho Sot, the technical instructions of the meditation system are disseminated through temple publications and websites. Besides written and visual guidance on carrying out the technique and how to improve one's practice, there is also detailed information on the characteristics and appearance of the bodies one is expected to encounter while in meditation. It is interesting to note that a regular magazine produced by Wat Dhammakāya providing this guidance and information is named *kalyāṇamitta* or spiritual friend. According to the Visuddhimagga, this term refers to the meditation instructor who plays an important role in providing personal instruction.

The wealth of information available online and in publications thus enables one to practice in the comfort of one's home, without the need to seek a teacher. Even if one chooses to seek instruction in the temple, there may not be a need for personalized instruction. This is seen in the case of Wat Paknam today,

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[46] Refer to Dhamma Center for Buddhist Meditation Studies website: http://www.meditationthai.org/docs/en/meditation_testimonials.html [2011, 20 January].

[47] Newell: 2008, p. 247.

[48] See The Middle Way Meditation Website: http://www.dhammacenter.org/

which plays tape recordings of Luang Por Sot's teachings and meditation instructions every Thursday at 2pm.[49]

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's *Ānāpāna-sati* method

Background

Buddhadāsa (1906-1993) was born in Chaiya, Surath Thani. He established Suan Mokkhabalarama (The Grove of the Power of Liberation), commonly known as Suan Mokh in 1932 at Surat Thani Province, southern Thailand. It eventually emerged as a renowned center for Buddhist meditation and study.

Buddhadāsa is known to possess extremely doctrinal, modernist and rationalist views considered revolutionary in Thai traditional Buddhism. He is well known for his teachings based on what he referred to as the original realization of the Lord Buddha before it was buried under commentaries, ritualism and clerical politics. For instance, in the aspect of rebirth, he sees the cycle of dependent origin as not referring to literal rebirth, but as the arising of suffering at any moment in one's life.[50] In the aspect of Buddhist cosmology, he interprets it as psychological states, rather than actual planes of existences.[51] This would have implications for the way he views Buddhist practice, in which enlightenment or the state of *nibbāna* is not necessarily achieved via the accumulation of spiritual resources or countless past lives, but can be attained in the here and now as long as one is mindful. This

[49] Amphai Tansomboon, *Mae Che*: 2004, p. 122.

[50] Peter Jackson 2003: p. 112.

message is best depicted in fig. 1 taken at the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok.

Figure 1: Mindfulness: only one word is enough to reach *nibbāna*

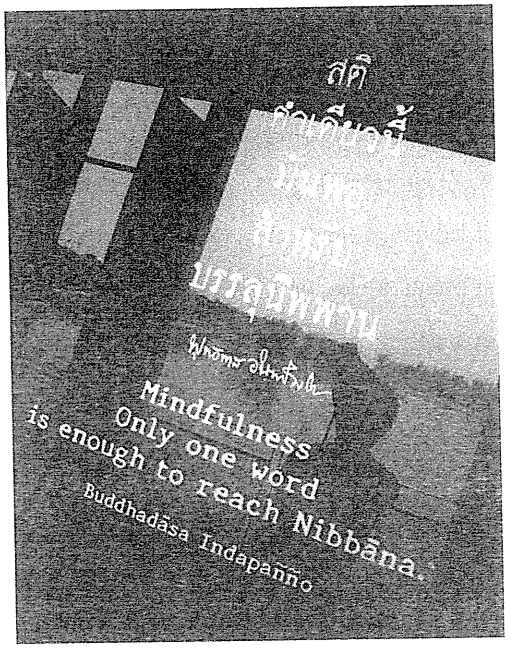

Photo: Patrick Ong 2010

Existing academic literature about Buddhadāsa's teachings has tended to focus on Buddhadāsa's legacy on Thai Buddhist thought and philosophy, and his progressive interpretation of canonical texts to suit the needs of the modern world. Some examples of work done about Buddhadāsa and his teachings are Peter Jackson's, 'Buddhadāsa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand',[52] Donald K. Swearer's 'Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa on Ethics and Society'[53] and Suwanna

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[52] Peter Jackson. Buddhadāsa: *Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003.

[53] Donald K. Swearer. Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa on Ethics and Society. *The Journal of*

Satha-Anand's paper 'Buddhadāsa's Challenges: Towards Modern Buddhism in Thai Society'.[54]

Meditation teachings

The method of meditation promoted by Buddhadāsa and taught at Suan Mokh is *ānāpāna-sati*, or mindfulness of breathing. He considers it superior to other meditation methods as it incorporates both *samādhi* and *vipassanā*.[55] The Buddha explained this method in the *ānāpana-sati sutta* or Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing. It uses the breath as the focus for mindfulness meditation and is also a branch into the four foundations of mindfulness as a way to penetrate into the four noble truths.[56] Buddhadāsa claims that this was the method used by the Buddha himself before his enlightenment. He adds that this is verified by the Pali canon, which does not mention that the Buddha had used other forms of meditation practices.[57] Buddhadāsa thus teaches that there is no need to use any other meditation object as stated in the Visuddhimagga. Mindfulness on the breath is sufficient.[58]

Buddhadāsa teaches that it is unnecessary for the meditator to reach intense *samatha* states. This is due to his dismissal of the supernormal powers it can generate and also that one can become attached to these blissful meditative states. Further, in these deeply concentrative states, the mind cannot practice

[54] Suwanna Satha-Anand, Buddhadāsa's Challenges: Towards Modern Buddhism in Thai Society, paper presented for *Conference in Thai Studies*, University of London, 1993.

[55] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 25.

[56] Zar Zar 2009: p. 19.

[57] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 23-24.

insight at all. He claims that minimal *samādhi* such as '*upacāra samādhi*' is quite sufficient before turning to the practice of *vipassanā*.[59]

In his teachings, there is no need to withdraw into a forest or a retreat to practice meditation, nor is there a need to utter any word or mantra. It is also unnecessary to perform any rituals or rites before practicing meditation.[60] It can be practiced anywhere and at any place and even on a speeding train. The main aim is for the mind to be 'closed' to all intrusions so that no matter what kind of environment one is in, it is possible to be in a 'quiet and tranquil forest'.[61] This is the basis for *nibbāna*, which is available for all in the form of mental calm and peace.

Buddhadāsa mentions that his teachings on *ānāpāna-sati* could be self-taught via the use of a handbook.[62] This is seen clearly in one English translated book containing his discourses, titled: 'A handbook for a perfect form of *ānāpāna-sati bhāvanā* Meditation'.[63] In the introductory message, the publishers state that the book aims to provide a 'guiding path leading to the proper practice of all the sixteen steps of *ānāpana-sati*' and for 'anyone to adopt it as a handbook for self-help or a do-it-yourself meditation practice'.[64] However, if practitioners find the sixteen steps too difficult to execute, but are still interested in enjoying the benefits of meditation, another book entitled '*Samatha- Vipassanā*, a short cut system' is recommended. This book empowers practitioners to skip the full sixteen steps, if

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[59] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 73.

[60] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 25.

[61] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 27.

[62] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 22.

[63] See bibliography for more details

they know their own temperament well enough to select which stage is suitable for them.[65]

This thus replaces the face-to-face instruction provided by the meditation instructor in the temple.

Besides handbooks, it is also possible for one to receive instruction by bringing empty tapes to Suan Mokh and exchanging them for recorded tapes of his sermons.[66]

Luang Pho Theean's method (Dynamic meditation)[67]

Luang Pho Theean (1911-1988) was born in Tambon Baan Buahom, Amphoe Chien Khan, Loei. The bulk of his life was spent not as a monk but as a layman. During his life as a layperson, he was an avid student of meditation, studying with various teachers in the Northeast and in Laos. At the age of forty-six, he encountered a Lao monk, Ajarn Pan, who taught him a meditation technique in which he experienced a breakthrough. He adapted Ajarn Pan's teachings and named it the dynamic meditation method. After his second ordination at fourty-eight years of age, he spent part of his life as a monk at Wat Sanamnai, Nonthaburi and in his last days, at Tapmingkwan meditation center in Loei.

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[65] Buddhadāsa 2003: p.6.

[66] Buddhadāsa 2003: p. 7

There has been scant academic research conducted about this meditation tradition and its impact on Thai society. The only research works I could find was a Master's thesis written by Venica Pookgaman, 'A Study of the "Dynamic Meditation" Practice of Luangpor Teean Jittasubho' under the Buddhist Studies faculty of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University[68] and an unpublished paper written by Tavivat Puntarigvivat, titled 'The dynamic practices of Luangpor Teean, a Thai meditation Master.'[69]

Meditation teachings

Dynamic meditation commences with the rhythmic movement of hands and arms, where the goal is to develop awareness. It is this continual movement that gives the technique the name "Dynamic Meditation."[70] This is performed by mindfully raising the hands; walking back and forth, moving hands to and from the thighs to the chest back and forth. It is neither a form of concentration, visualization or mental recitation, but a way of developing awareness so that the mind can directly encounter, see and break through thoughts.

Luang Pho Theean claims that by going beyond the confines of thought, mental suffering will cease.[71] In some sense, this is similar to Mahasi's Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation, which is more static. Both methods develop insight into the five aggregates, with the exception that the Dynamic meditation method intentionally generates movement. It is thus also promoted as a practice for people

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[68] Venica Pookgaman. *A Study of the "Dynamic Meditation" Practice of Luangpor Teean Jittasubho.* Master's thesis, Department of Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, Mahachulalongkornrajvidyalaya University, 2007.

[69] This paper was obtained from an email correspondence with Dr Tavivat Puntarigvivat.

[70] Pookgaman 2007: p. 41

who have little free time for formal sitting down meditation sessions.[72]

Followers of his method have argued that it can be considered a variation of the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta* (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness), which contemplates the body, feelings, mind and dhammas. Research conducted by Pookgaman argues that although the deliberate hand and arm movements at the stage of contemplation of the body seems to be an innovation not found in the scriptures, her thesis reveals that these movements are entirely within the spirit of the *sutta*.[73]

Luang Pho Theean believed that the cultivation of mindfulness through dynamic meditation is a short cut resulting in the attainment of Arahantship. Practicing this method diligently enables one to reach *nibbāna* in a few years, or even as quickly as a few months.[74] He was also known to have maintained that the development of extreme concentration through the use of *samatha* was unnecessary, distracting and even harmful to the pursuit of *nibbāna*.

The dynamic meditation instruction is readily available on the Internet as seen in an English webpage named '*Mahāsati* Meditation' that was set up under the direction of Luang Pho Thong Abhakaro, the current abbot of Wat Sanamnai and as claimed by his followers, the successor of Luang Pho Theen.[75] It contains instructions and quotations from Luang Pho Theen and illustrations for the practitioner to follow in the comforts in one's home. Challenges and obstacles

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[72] Pookgaman 2007: p. 73.

[73] Pookgaman 2007: p. 5.

[74] Pookgaman 2007: p. 77.

[75] Refer to the Mahasati Meditation website: http://www.mahasati.org/ [2011, 21

experienced by the practitioner are addressed. It also provides an estimate time frame on the levels one would attain if one practices the method diligently. For instance, according to Luang Pho Theen's own words, for 'a conscientious man, no longer than three years, you will attain the end of suffering'.

Analysis of Contemporary Meditation Movements

An analysis of the five popular contemporary meditation movements in Thailand examined in this chapter sheds light on common features that make them distinctive in the twenty-first century.

I have grouped these common features into four categories as follows; Nature of origin; Legitimization; Transmission of teachings; Teachings and techniques. This is displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Common features of contemporary meditation traditions

Categories	Common Features
Nature of origin	These contemporary meditation traditions arose due to the availability of Buddhist texts since 1830s with the advent of the printing press[76] or/and due to the founder's dissatisfaction with traditional meditation techniques existing in Thailand.
Legitimization	These contemporary meditation traditions often need to justify their teachings based on Buddhist

	texts such as the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna* and the *Ānāpāna-sati suttas.* This often seen by the discourse of the founders or by the practitioners of the particular meditation tradition.
Transmission of teachings	It is observed that most of the contemporary meditation traditions propagate their meditation methods via books, cassette tapes, websites and other forms of media. This removes the agency from the teacher. The practitioner is empowered to determine the best approach he should use for himself. For the serious practitioner, meditation classes and retreats are organized where people are taught in groups.
Teachings and techniques	It is observed that contemporary meditation traditions often teach their practitioners to employ the same meditation device or technique, whether it is focusing on the breath, two finger-breadths above the navel, or noting the falling and rising of the abdomen. This is standardized for all new practitioners of the respective contemporary tradition. The meditational device is a 'one size fits all', where there is no need to choose a device or

	method appropriate for one's temperament. The techniques can be practiced anywhere, due to its minimal ritualistic elements.[77] This would make contemporary meditation methods easy for propagation to a western audience. Information concerning what one experiences or sees as one progress in meditation is not esoteric. It is openly revealed, and practitioners are encouraged to read about it. Prior knowledge about these visions or *nimittas* are considered useful for the practitioner who is able to match his or her experience with what has been written to determine what stages they are at. The practice and importance of *samatha* varies depending on the different meditation schools. For those who advocate the importance of *samatha*, there is no systematic or step-by-step method on building it gradually[78] Advancement is depicted as easy as long as one is

[77] The common example given is riding a bus.

[78] For *Dhammakāya* meditation, progress on *samādhi* is based on the nature and appearance of the visions encountered while others such as Ajarn Brahmavamso, under Ajarn Mun's forest tradition determines it based on the bright lights known as *nimittas* and the

	committed. One is not expected to devote a lifetime to achieve the effects. Effects such as peace and tranquility are often promoted as sufficient unto itself and they can be achieved in a short time. In the case of attaining *nibbāna*, some systems even promote themselves as a 'short-cut' route. It is noted that these contemporary systems usually do not consist of many stages or levels. Even if they do, the practitioner could still achieve the higher levels even after attending a short retreat, as seen in some centers teaching *Dhammakāya* meditation

3

The Creation of a Monolithic Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand

Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine ideas about the creation of 'monolithic' Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand. This religion is sometimes referred to as state or orthodox Buddhism. It is often depicted as a 'centralized, bureaucratic and hierarchical religion emphasizing discipline (*vinaya*)'.[1] It is also referred to as institutionalized Buddhism[2] and is deemed to be extremely strict regarding what constitutes 'correct practice' or orthopraxy.[3] It is also described as conservative and stagnant, not conducive to the development of a dynamic intellectual, cultural or doctrinal innovation in Thailand.[4]

Many books and articles writing about the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand have contributed towards this 'monolithic' perception. For instance, the historian Wyatt comments that by the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign in 1910, Buddhism was becoming a uniform and common religion.[5] Some academic work has highlighted that this notion is supported mainly by secondary sources, rather than by field research on the ground.[6] I note that for many

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[1] Tiyavanich 1997: p. 2.

[2] Wyatt 1994: p. 216.

[3] Jackson 2003: p. 19.

[4] Jackson 2003: p. 17.

[5] Wyatt 1994: p. 216.

academics in the past, the development of this discourse about Buddhism in Thailand being 'monolithic' was necessary in their formulation of theories and hypotheses concerning the creation of the nation-state and its impact onto the modernization process in Thailand.[7]

Based on an overview of books and articles, I believe that the perception of a 'uniform' and 'monolithic' Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand can be traced from the development of two themes. These themes have been presented in various academic and historical literatures.

The two themes refer to: -

- The creation of a new interpretation of Theravāda Buddhism in Bangkok during the early nineteen-century. This served as the basis for state ideology and was imposed onto the rest of the country as part of the nation building process;
- The notion of discontinuity and rupture between the pre-modern and modern periods. Nation building, with the implementation of reforms, resulted in a form of Theravāda Buddhism that has radically changed to become different from the historical past.

Since the foundation of 'monolithic' Buddhism rests on these two themes, I shall examine how such ideas were created with the aim of gaining some insights into its actual nature.

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[7] Examples are the works of Ishii, Yoneo. Sañgha *State and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986; Reynolds, Craig James. *The Buddhist monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Philosophy, Cornell University, 1972; Wyatt, David K. *Thailand: A Short History*. New Haven [Conn.] Yale

First theme: The creation of state Buddhism or Buddhist orthodoxy

Most writers developing this theme would emphasize the diversity of Buddhist practices and traditions in the region. This diversity was depicted as prevalent before the demarcation of boundaries arising from the formation of the Thai nation-state. The theme that is commonly projected is that of a political center in Bangkok developing its own interpretation of Buddhism which it considered more pristine as it is universal and pan- Theravāda in nature rather than steeped in archaic local traditions. This process started during the Fourth Reign, setting the stage for the imposition of an ideology in an attempt to eliminate religious diversity within the country.

For instance, Tiyavanich presents Thailand before the birth of the modern state as a country populated with many kingdoms (Thai: *meuang* เมือง) that considered themselves autonomous and paid tribute to more powerful kingdoms. These kingdoms had different cultures, histories and forms of Buddhism, which were influenced by indigenous spirit worship and by Mahāyāna and Tantric traditions that flourished prior to the fourteen century.[8]

Siam, with its center at Bangkok, was but one of the many kingdoms within what is known as Thailand today. This polity fashioned a new form of Buddhism that arose as a reform movement during the nineteen-century. According to various historical accounts, the leader of this reform movement was King Mongkut. He was dissatisfied with the inconsistencies between the practices of the Thai monks and the monastic codes of the Pali canon. This resulted in the founding of a new sector *nikai* known as the *Thammayut*. The name of this new sect, meaning 'the order

adhering to the dhamma' espoused the king's interpretations on what constituted 'true Buddhism'.

This 'true Buddhism' was characterized by strict discipline based on the *vinaya*. It entailed a different ordination ritual with focus on the size and placement of the *sima* stones. It advocated a different way of wearing the robes such as draping the monastic cloak over both shoulders, and emphasized a more 'correct' pronunciation in the chanting of Pali. More significantly, it placed a greater emphasis on selected scriptures deemed more authentic, such as the study of Pali canon and the commentaries. These scriptures were interpreted in a rational manner, compatible with science in contrast to experiences considered metaphysical, which could only be verified by meditation. Tambiah describes this obsession to return back to what was deemed as 'orthodoxy' by separating the 'true' canon from its impure adhesions as scripturalism.[9] This reform movement consequently attacked a wide range of traditional fields of knowledge relating to ritual, astrology, medicine, folklore, etc.[10]

The creation of this 'pristine' Buddhism in my opinion can be attributed to two factors; external western encroachment and internal political struggles.

[9] Tambiah 1976: p. 211.

Almost all historians would claim that the development of a rationalistic approach to religion was partly a response to the west, in particular the Christian missionaries. There was a need to meet expectations that Buddhism was an intellectual religion, compatible with science and could support intellectual study and learning.[11] This was necessary, if Siam was to be viewed as an enlightened country.

Another more personal factor was King Mongkut's attempt to draw upon spiritual capital in order to tilt the balance of power from his half-brother, King Rama III. There were power struggles in the court at that time as King Mongkut, the rightful heir, was outmaneuvered for the throne by his elder less eligible, half-brother.[12] King Mongkut retreated into the monkhood as it was the traditional means of refuge for a contender to the throne to escape assassination. Gray argues that while as a monk for twenty-seven years, King Mongkut, modeled himself on the paradigm of the historical Buddha. He followed the same dialectical structure as Gotama by initially seeking various forms of knowledge and after which, coming up with his own brand of rationalistic Buddhism, sought a rejection and synthesis of the knowledge learnt.[13] This was a necessary move to accrue merit in the eyes of the people and facilitate his own ascension to the throne after the death of King Rama III.

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[11] Tiyavanich 1997: p. 7.

[12] Tambiah 1976: p. 209. It has to be mentioned that this interpretation has been questioned by subsequent research work, which claims that it is based on Western (English and French) concepts of succession and other misunderstandings.

This 'new knowledge' entailed rejecting the form of Buddhism that had placed an emphasis on meditation and mystical elements, even if his predecessors, particularly his half-brother, had used it as a means of legitimizing the rule of the Chakri dynasty. For instance, the *Triphum Phra Ruang* was a cosmological work produced by King Lu-Tai in 1345 and was traditionally used by subsequent kings in Siamese history to legitimize their rule as it played an important role justifying the relationship between the ruler and his subjects. The *Triphum* was however considered by King Mongkut as steeped in the old traditional beliefs and unable to withstand the test of western science.[14] He also criticized the traditional belief that the recitation of the *Mahachat* would accrue merit for its listeners. This was a popular practice amongst villages where monks would recite the *Vessantara Jataka* day and night during festive occasions. King Mongkut commented that the money spent would be better employed in burning a dead dog's carcass.[15] In essence, the rejection of these texts and the worldview it promoted was simply due to the fact that it was not considered authoritative compared to the Pali canon, specifically the *Tipiṭaka* (Thai: *Phra Traipidok*).

King Mongkut's version of doctrinal Buddhism, practiced by his new order, the *Thammayut*, was seen to follow the 'pristine' version of Buddhism by adhering closely to scripture as it was believed to contain the direct words of the Buddha. Other Buddhist traditions were collectively grouped and termed *Mahanikay*. He considered this older tradition 'an order of long-standing habit', implying that these monks had blindly followed the practices of their forefathers which had deviated from the original Buddhism.[16]

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[14] Reynolds 2006: Chapter 8.

[15] Keyes 1989: p. 125.

Academic research thus presents a picture, which portrays the elite in Bangkok as viewing traditional Thai Buddhism with contempt. For instance, according to Ishii: "Thai monks were seen as not conversant in Pali and for them, the canonical scriptures were little more than incomprehensible spells to be chanted at ceremonies. A systematic understanding of the Buddhist doctrine was virtually inaccessible to the average monk.[17]

The conception on what constituted 'true' and 'pristine' Buddhism' further intensified during King Chulalongkorn's reign. The King sought to reform the canon and the teaching of Buddhism in Thailand based on a strict historical and canonical understanding of Buddhism. His survey of the monasteries in 1886 led him to conclude that Buddhist teaching in the region was 'full of nonsense' as it was based on the *jatakas* and folktales rather than the actual words of the Buddha.[18] Educational reforms under King Chulalongkorn ensured that material dealing with superstition, which could not be verified by science, was removed from Thai curricula. The *jataka* stories, such as those involving Phra Malai, which described the planes of heaven, hell and the notion of rebirth, were discredited and redefined not as describing actual reality but as examples of pre-Buddhist folklore passed down by simple minded people.[19]

The creation of this 'pristine' Buddhism fueled by King Mongkut and continued under his son King Chulalongkorn became significant when Bangkok commenced the construction of the nation-state.

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[17] Ishii 1986: p. 76.

[18] McDaniel 2008: p. 102.

It has often been argued that the formation of the Thai nation-state was a necessary process considering the fact that the colonial powers of Britain and France were fast encroaching into the territories of Siam from all sides. Siam's traditional enemies such as Burma as well as Vietnam and Cambodia (incorporated into Indochina) had fallen into the hands of more powerful entities and her traditional vassal states in the south were increasingly under threat as well. There was thus a need to redefine the traditional pre-modern polity of Siam, with her center at Bangkok into a nation-state in order to deal with the western colonial powers at their own terms.

In their conception of a nation-state, many academics have employed Anderson's model of 'imagined community', where ideology and symbols were used by the political elites to create homogeneity within the boundaries of the nation.[20] For historians examining Thai history, many argue that this homogeneity came from the dominant center in Bangkok promoting its own culture, language and belief systems to the peripheral areas of the nation.

One of the symbols or ideological tools employed by Bangkok to homogenize differences that existed within its borders was the promotion of a common religious outlook. The form of Buddhism created by King Mongkut and which the *Thammayut* order embodied was used for this purpose. It thus became the model for what became known as modern state Buddhism.[21]

Academics argue that this served a functional purpose for the state. For instance, according to Keyes, the promotion of this common religion was important as it served to negate 'primordial attachments' of the various regions, which had

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[20] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Editions, 1983.

their own identities and were now incorporated into the Thai nation-state. To the administration of King Chulalongkorn, Buddhism as traditionally practiced in these regions represented a potential threat to national integration because its local manifestations were articulated with autonomous polities.[22] Tambiah agrees with this argument when he claims that 'at this phase of Thai history, the idea that cultural diversity could exist inside a single national political framework was difficult to conceptualize and accept'.[23]

This task of propagating 'orthodox' Buddhism came under King Chulalongkorn's half brother, Prince Wachirayan who was the abbot of Wat Bowonniwet and also the head of the *Thammayut* order. There were several attempts made by Prince Wachirayan to promote this Bangkok version of 'orthodox' Buddhism. Trips were made to different parts of the nation-state to ensure that monks were following the *vinaya* and monks from these regions were sent to Bangkok to improve their studies of the dhamma.[24]

The implementation of policies aimed at centralization and homogenizing all diversity within the Thai nation-state, particularly with reference to religion is often emphasized in academic research, with one significant policy being the saṅgha act of 1902. This will be discussed in the next theme, under discontinuity and rupture.

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[22] Keyes 1970: p. 2.

[23] Tambiah 1976: p. 239.

Theme of Discontinuity and Rupture

A significant change highlighted by researchers of Thai Buddhist history is the saṅgha act of 1902. Many have invoked this as the main turning point that Thai Buddhism was entering the modern phase. Tambiah describes it as a 'watershed' that resulted in vital implications for the saṅgha and the way it came to be administered.[25] Ishii claims that it resulted in a saṅgha that was stable, orderly and uniform, but it also robbed Thai Buddhism of much of its vitality.[26] Despite revisions to the law in 1941 and 1962, the essence of the act has remained unchanged.

As argued, the main consequence is the centralization of the saṅgha in two aspects; administration and education.

Before this act, monastic education and administration in Thailand was not formal or centralized. It depended on the aims of each monastery.[27] These aims were determined by ordination lineages and traditions that had existed for many centuries.

In the process of centralization, a saṅgha bureaucracy was created with the Supreme Patriarch, Prince Wachirayan at the top of the hierarchy.[28] The previously autonomous and independent saṅgha were now brought into line with the civilian government authority. It laid the foundations in which the authority of the king as 'defender of the religion' extended nationwide, and in which, through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, all monasteries, from the largest in the capital to the

[25] Tambiah 1976: p. 201.

[26] Ishii 1986: p. 68.

[27] McDaniel 2008: p. 101

smallest in the outlying regions, and all monks and novices, were brought under the sway of that authority.[29]

The act divided the Buddhist ecclesia into formal ranks and assigned national, provincial and district heads onto the saṅgha. This created a grading system or a hierarchy of monks, each reporting to the saṅgha Council, the *Mahatherasamakom*.[30]. Each grade has an insignia in the form of a fan (*phat yot samanasak*), which was carried on formal occasions.[31] Besides the prestige accompanying the ranks, ranking also determined the size of the allowance they received from the central government. The top positions of ecclesiastical power were concentrated in Bangkok. This reflected the realm of civil administration in which the king and the royal princes, to the highest nobility in the capital possessed the highest administrative power.[32]

All abbots of individual monasteries had to report regularly to their district and regional heads.[33] As a consequence, the ecclesiastical administrative structure linked Bangkok with approximately 80,000 monks scattered throughout the kingdom.[34] All monks had to be registered with a particular monastery and were issued identification numbers and cards.

Ordaining monks independently into regional traditions ended with this act, since the ability to become a preceptor had to be assessed and approved by the

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[29] Ishii 1986: p. 72.

[30] All titular ranks were given by the king and were broadly divided into four levels- somdet phramahasamana, somdet phrarachakhana, phrarachakhana and phrakhru. These were further divided into a total of 21 grades.

[31] Ishii 1986: p. 75.

[32] Tambiah 1976: p. 238.

[33] McDaniel 2008: p. 101

saṅgha authorities at Bangkok. This was also seen in the case of new traditions viewed with suspicion by the saṅgha authorities. For instance, Luang Pho Sot, the founder of the new and popular *Dhammakāya* meditation system, was denied the position to ordain monks into his order despite the fact that he had been abbot of Wat Paknam for thirty-three years. The title was finally given in 1949 when he had used his meditational abilities to heal a high-ranking monk, Somdet Vanarat who would later on play an important role in expediting this process.[35]

In response to this disempowerment and loss of autonomy experienced by regional lineages and traditions, there arose sporadic resistance in the form of resistance monks in the north like Khruba Sri Wichai and the holy men rebellions in the northeast till 1924.

The monarchial reformation of Buddhist education and practices as seen in the 1902 act was not considered particularly modern. Since the thirteen-century, kings of various independent kingdoms around Thailand saw that it was their duty to collect and edit Buddhist texts, rewrite Buddhist history, and purge the saṅgha of corruption. The saṅgha act of 1902 thus had important precedents.[36] The main difference was its impact, which was more widespread. Before, monarchial control over the saṅgha only affected royal monasteries and it was only in the royal monasteries that the king appointed monks to ecclesiastical office[37]

In keeping to the belief that 'true' Buddhism was only accessible in the Pali canon, Prince Wachirayan promoted the study of Pali grammar. He composed six

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[35] Magness 2007: *The Life and Teaching of Chao Khun Mongkol-Thepmuni and the Dhammakaya*, p. 8. Retrieved from http://www.triple-gem.net/BookList.html [2010, 25 December].

[36] Tambiah 1976: p. 183

volumes of Pali grammar and several guidebooks. These textbooks written in Thai became the standard curriculum for monks and the basis for the *nak dham* Buddhist examinations, which comprise of three grades. Prince Wachirayan's doctrinal textbook entitled *Nawakowat* became the most important textbook for doctrinal examinations established in 1911. The examinations were in Thai language and aimed to raise the standards of religious knowledge among monks and novices. It is still today the most concise and authoritative doctrinal textbook and still serves as the primer in the ecclesiastical examination curriculum.[38]

It has been noted that in these exams, candidates are required to reproduce accurately the content of the designated textbooks, which allowed no flexibility in doctrinal interpretation.

In 1913, the examinations became standard for all monks in the kingdom. Monks who wanted a national ranking had to travel to Bangkok and receive this training. These ranks were important for practical reasons as it could lead to employment after the monk disrobed. In addition, the monk could also be forced to disrobe if he did not pass any of the exams.[39]

Success in these examinations made it an essential qualification for candidacy for the traditional Pali exams and success in the Pali exams earned the monk the appellation of *parian*, resulting in more allowances from the king, respect from society and opened the way for advancement in the saṅgha. Thus, aspiration among monks to pass these exams and preparation for doctrinal exams became the only incentive for studying the dhamma. According to Taylor, temples, which had previously emphasized on meditation, were now turning to Pali studies. This was seen in the case of Wat Sangwet where the abbots towards the end of the fifth reign

[38] Ishii 1986: pp. 76-77

were Pali scholars in contrast to the past where they were meditation teachers.[40] Monasteries such as Wat Aranyawaasii, Wat Aranyabanphot ansd Wat Hin Maak Peng, which were once established by wandering meditation monks in the early twentieth century, have over the decades been placed under the charge of administrative scholarly monks and reoriented their emphasis from meditation to scriptural studies.[41] This demonstrated the impact of the saṅgha reforms on the ground.

The theme of discontinuity due to the process of centralization is further highlighted with the intensification of Buddhism as a state religion in Thailand. According to Jackson, Theravāda Buddhism as interpreted through the elite in Bangkok eventually became the foundation for the civilian government in 1932.[42] The religion became closely associated with the nation and the monarch. These three symbols came to be used by the Thai government, particularly the military regimes in promoting national unity and what should be conceived as 'Thai'.

Institutionalized Buddhism continued as the ideological bulwark and also became used for national development after World War II, beginning with the regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963). His regime emphasized national unity and a further integration of peripheral or marginal groups in terms of ethnic differences, as seen in the case of hill tribes into what was defined as 'Thai'. State Buddhism thus became a useful tool for delineating and suppressing differences considered by the state as potentially restive.

Jackson argues, that it is due to this politico-ideological role that the state continues to hold a tight control over the organization and education of the saṅgha.

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[40] Taylor 1993: p. 32.

The state, according to him, 'both supports and controls it'.[43] The consequence for this is the stifling of intellectual inquiry or debate. The Thai saṅgha, due to its monopolistic and authoritarian structure, supported by the saṅgha bills has stifled freedoms of expression or challenges to its authority by claiming that they are heretical to orthodox Buddhism.

As such, Thai Buddhism from this perspective is seen as rigid, inflexible and non-dynamic as it does not evolve and adapt to the changing world.

Insights into the notion of 'monolithic' Buddhism

The foundation on which Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand is viewed as 'monolithic' thus rests on the academic discourse of two themes; The creation of 'pristine' Buddhism and the rupture or discontinuity after the implementation of the 1902 saṅgha act.

While the term monolithic gives the impression that the Buddhist religion in Thailand is uniform in terms of all practices and ideology, a closer analysis of the historical process provides some insight into its actual nature.

A closer look at 'pristine' Buddhism

It is observed that this 'pristine' Buddhism created and championed by King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn concerned itself with two main aspects- firstly, ritualistic practices and modes of conduct, which I note, were open to public

view and secondly, the emphasis on scripture, and only on certain texts, which were considered more authoritative over others.

These two aspects have traditionally pertained to the vocation of the *gantha dhura* monks who were town dwellers (Pali: *gāmavāsin*), often in contact with the people. They were also engaged in ceremonies and were devoted to the teaching and study of the dhamma, derived from selected texts. I note that the practice and transmission of meditation, the vocation of the *vipassanā dhura* (Pali: *araññavāsin*) or the meditation monks who lived in seclusion from the society remained untouched by this 'pristine' Buddhism. This 'pristine' Buddhism did not impose a version of what it considered right meditation practice. Nonetheless, academics claim, it did downplay the role of meditation as a worthwhile endeavor and considered meditative experiences as irrational.

One should also be cautious about academic work with its assumptions that this 'pristine' Buddhism was entirely rationalistic and demystified. Newell, interestingly reexamines this when she claims that many scholars have been influenced by royal historians, whose writings have served to promote the prestige of King Mongkut who is often depicted as a 'noble Buddhist reformer' and had appealed to western notions of rationalism in an attempt to 'save' the country.[44]

Academics in the past have claimed that King Mongkut did not think highly of meditation, which he considered irrational, as experiences obtained from this practice could not be verified empirically.[45] Contrary to this one-dimensional portrayal, King Mongkut was according to some sources a practitioner of meditation and believed it to be beneficial to his personal and political life.[46] It is

[44] For some examples, see Newell 2008: p. 70, Taylor: 1993, p. 41.

noted that the king had studied meditation early in his life at Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Samorai, which were famous for the teaching of meditation. He promoted non-Buddhist Brahmanic court rituals and even compiled new magical chants.[47] In addition, both King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn were known to have patronized Somdet To and his pupil Luang Puu Phuu who were well-known meditation forest monks and believed in their 'mystical prowess'.[48]

This further adds to the claim that 'pristine' Buddhism, created and propagated by the rulers did not eradicate every aspect that was deemed mystical, unempirical or could not be explained by science. This was because, meditation and other spiritual practices and rituals were deemed expeditious on a personal level. The kings subscribed to certain 'irrational' practices, which were interestingly generated by the practice of meditation, as they were considered efficacious. My argument thus reveals that prior academic notion of what constituted 'pristine' Buddhism was rather one-dimensional in nature.

A closer look at Rupture and Discontinuity

With this 'pristine' Buddhism created in Bangkok eventually emerging as 'orthodox' Buddhism due to nation building, the notion of a 'monolithic' Buddhism in Thailand was thus formed. Closer examination however reveals that the nature of this monolithic uniformity is only applicable in the arena of administration and education of the saṅgha. The state, whose legitimacy rests on the purity of the saṅgha, is mainly concerned with how the saṅgha on the whole is managed and the ideology, which binds it together.

Reynolds clams that in the past each teacher installed his individual approach to his disciples in the aspect of literary skills, commitment to ascetism, adherence to the *vinaya* and his own method of achieving the progressively higher states that would lead to enlightenment.[49] Based on the historical process we have examined, it is clear that the first three aspects were subsumed by the state during the process of nation building. The last aspect in my opinion was not the concern of the state as it was too abstract and intangible to be regulated.

According to McDaniel, the recurrent trend amongst academics looking into Southeast Asian history was to focus on the rupture between the present and the past. This was the common model of analysis where the questions asked were what have been destroyed rather than what has survived and flourished.[50] The interest of many Southeast Asian academics were in examining impact of colonialism and external influences such as capitalism, globalization, technology, science and Christianity into the region. Similarly, historians specializing in Thai history have adopted this same model of analysis. From what has been discussed, we can clearly observe that the notion of 'monolithic' Buddhism and uniformity in the religion is seen mainly in the centralization of the administration of the Thai saṅgha and the ideological control of this entity in the form of state approved and selected educational or scriptural texts.

Conclusion: The actual nature of 'monolithic' Buddhism in Thailand

While the conception of Buddhism being 'monolithic' is seen clearly in certain aspects, particularly after the process of nation-building, the perception in which Buddhism was becoming a uniform and common religion, as claimed by the historian Wyatt, [51] and had reached a level of stagnation as claimed by Ishii,[52] ignores ground realities. This is seen in terms of transmissions of teachings, not pertaining to scripture, but in particular, those pertaining to meditation practices and techniques. These are diverse and not regulated by state reforms. From such a vantage point, there is a possibility that Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand could in actual fact be more heterogeneous and dynamic in practice and possess a greater extent of continuity from the past than previously examined. This will be observed from my examination of the *Matchima* meditation system later in Chapter 5.

[51] Wyatt 1994: p. 216

[52] Ishii 1986: p. 68, whom he claims that reforms such as the 1902 [illegible] had

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The Manuscript of the Venerable Suk and the *Yogāvacara* Tradition

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an overview and summary of Venerable Suk's manuscript. I will then proceed to analyze the manuscript based on the characteristics of the *Yogāvacara* tradition, which have been identified earlier by previous academics and determine whether the practices and philosophy expounded in the manuscript should be classified as belonging to the same tradition.

Background, characteristics and features of the *Yogāvacara* tradition

Increasing awareness of the *Yogāvacara* tradition was due to research undertaken by some scholars who decided to adopt an alternative approach to the study of Buddhism. Before this, the main approach was primarily from a historical perspective, where importance was placed in examining the relationship between countries, the role of the rulers and their polities in adopting the faith.[1]

[1] There have been several historical studies on how Buddhism originating from India had impacted countries which were receptive to it. For instance, much has been written about how the kingdoms of Suvarnnabhumi (Southeast Asia) were the recipients of a rich and varied heritage of Buddhist traditions that had developed in India and Ceylon. To a large extent, this perspective

This view 'from above', while insightful in understanding the development of Buddhism from a lineal perspective, portrays Buddhism as a commodity that does not evolve but is distributed as a cultural product and traded from place to place.

While this methodology obscures the nature of how Buddhism is actually practiced or understood by the practitioners on the ground, the alternative perspective takes this into consideration. In this approach, indigenous pedagogical texts and methods which transmitted teachings over several generations were examined instead, resulting in the discovery that Buddhism consists of a multitude of traditions and practices which evolve over time, and do not conform to earlier academic understanding as derived from the canonical texts.[2]

This new approach has resulted in the 'discovery' of the *Yogāvacara* tradition. *Yogāvacara*, meaning the practitioner of spiritual discipline, is a term often cited in the texts and manuals used for meditation instruction. Kate Crosby

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the Southeast Asian polities themselves. These polities played a significant role in 'localizing' foreign belief and philosophical systems based on their own indigenous needs. For more information, refer to Wolters, O.W. *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives.* Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1999.

[2] The academic study of Buddhism from the perspective of the canonical texts can be traced back to the days of colonialism. European scholars placed more emphasis on understanding ancient cultures through the medium of classical languages (Sanskrit and Pali, as opposed to the local vernacular languages) and texts. This philological approach resulted in the devaluation of Buddhism as it was manifested in local societies, and many were judged to be not 'pure' or 'true' to the canonical texts. Examples of such scholars known for their philological approach are T.W. Rhys Davids, Max Müller and Monier Williams. Even scholars of a later generation have found it difficult to break free from the influence of early Buddhist scholarship and continue to view the study of Buddhist societies via the lens of textual approach. Examples are seen in the works of Spiro and Tambiah. For more information, refer to the article by Newell, Catherine Sarah. Approaches to the Study of Buddhism. In Bryan S. Turner (ed.) *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of*

appropriated this term to describe the presence of an esoteric tradition of texts and practices within Theravāda mainland Southeast Asia that differs from the rationalistic monolithic Theravāda presented in secondary sources.[3] Academic interest in this subject started with Crosby's translation and attempts to highlight the works of the French academic François Bizot. For the past three decades, Bizot has researched on a number of pre-modern texts and indigenous Buddhist practices in Cambodia.[4] His research revealed similarities with meditative and spiritual practices shared amongst the Theravāda Buddhist countries of Sri Lanka and other countries of mainland Southeast Asia. While Bizot classifies these practices under the category of Tantric Theravāda, other academics such as L.S. Cousins have been more conservative and termed it Esoteric Buddhism instead.[5]

According to Cousins, this tradition contains a variety of spiritual and meditational practices and can be classified as a type of Buddhism that links magical and ritual practices to the theoretical systemization of the Buddhist path.[6] He argues that this was part of normative southern Buddhism before the nineteen century. It possessed its own history, ideology, ritual and soteriological endeavor. Its decline was due to the rise of reformist groups and modernizing governments who have since the mid nineteen century tried to purge what was deemed as non-

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[3] Crosby 2000: p. 141.

[4] Bizot's research was conducted before the rise of the Khmer rouge. His work thus provides much insight into the nature of a local living tradition of Cambodian Buddhism that has been lost after the devastation of the country due to internal conflicts and the revival of Theravāda Buddhism in the country under foreign (Thai) rather than local influence. Crosby 2000: p. 142.

[5] The use of the term Tantric for this southern tradition of Buddhism is probably due to perceived similarities in practice with Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism as seen in the use of an initiation ritual before commencing practice with the teacher and the substitution of one's mundane body parts with that of divine concepts such as Buddhist terminology while in meditation. This is similar to that of placing deities into one's body and mind in an attempt to expedite spiritual

rational and esoteric from these practices by referring to these elements as a 'corruption' and a 'popular aberration'.

(Refer to Appendix B for additional features of the *Yogāvacara* tradition)

Kate Crosby's Definition

For the purpose of analyzing Venerable Suk's manuscript, I will use Crosby's definition based on her study of the works of Bizot and others regarding the *Yogāvacara* tradition. I will then attempt to analyze the Venerable Suk's manuscript based on this definition. Crosby lists eleven distinctive features of this tradition as follows: [7]

1. The creation of a Buddha within through the performance of a ritual by placing and recognizing within one's body the qualities of the Buddha, which in turn become the Buddha. This Buddha then replaces the unenlightened, physical individual at death
2. The use of sacred language, combined with microcosm to macrocosm identity. Sacred syllables or phrases are used to represent a large entity. Groups of syllables of a particular number represent other significant groups of the same number. This use of sacred language includes heart syllables, mantras and yantras.
3. Sacred language as the creative principle. The dhamma arises out of the Pali alphabet and sacred syllables. This refers to formation of dhamma in all sense of the term: in the sense of spiritual teaching, in the sense of the

qualities of a Buddha, and also dhamma in the sense of the material and living world.

4. The application of the substitution of items and the substituted item then being treated as the original.
5. Esoteric interpretations of words, objects and myths that otherwise have a standard exoteric meaning or purpose in Theravāda Buddhism.
6. The necessity of initiation prior to the performance of a ritual or practice.
7. The application of the methodologies outlined above to both soteriological ends, i.e., the pursuit of *nibbāna*, and worldly ends, such as healing, longevity, protection, invincibility and, potentially, the harming of others.
8. Foetal development and the spiritual recreation thereof.
9. The importance of *Abhidhamma* categories and the books of the *Abhidhamma piṭaka*.
10. The importance of performing *samādhi* and *vipassanā* meditation – although these are not interpreted as they are in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga.
11. Expertise in the *Yogāvacara* tradition is not restricted to monks. Lay people, including women, may be practitioners, and may even be teachers to monks.

Background to the English translated version of Venerable Suk's manuscript

Since I will be using Mano's English translated version of Venerable Suk's manuscript for my analysis, I find it necessary to provide a brief background to this version of the manuscript.

The translation was for the purpose of Mano's doctrinal dissertation.[8] He claims to have obtained the source copy from the National Library.[9] The contents of the manuscript were part of a book entitled, '*Samādhi* and *Vipassanā Kammaṭṭhāna* of the four eras'.[10] The book contains information on several ancient meditation manuscripts compiled by a monk named Phra Maha Chai Yasotharat and published in 1935.[11] Chai was a monk from Wat Boromniwat, a temple of the *Thammayut* order. In the preface, Chai claimed that the inspiration for this work was due to his admiration for these ancient teachings. He had heard about these ancient meditation systems from his teachers and wanted to preserve their teachings for posterity.[12] It is noted that this was also done with direction and support from Phra Ubali, the abbot of Wat Boromniwat.[13]

It is surprising that a monk from the *Tammayut* lineage would be interested in Buddhist practices that are from the *Mahanikay* and deemed as deviating from the authorized canonical scriptures. This further supports my

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[8] Mettanando Bhikkhu. *Meditation and Healing in the Theravada Buddhist Order of Thailand and Laos*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of Hamburg, 1998.

[9] The source copy is now missing from the National Library and I am not able to obtain the same copy from elsewhere. I have also made trips down to Wat Boromniwat to inquire if they had a copy of the book. The monk in charge informed me that it is currently on loan and was unsure when it would be returned.

[10] หนังสือพุทธรังษีธฤษฎาณ ว่าด้วยสมถและวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐาน๔ยุค.

[11] พระมหา ใจ ยโสธรัตน์.

argument in Chapter 3 that spiritual practices; particularly those pertaining to meditation techniques, were not the concern of the 'pristine' *Thammayut* interpretation of Buddhism.

Chai had received a copy of Venerable Suk's manuscript in 1936 from Chao Khun Phra Yanarakkhita who had inherited it from Phra Ajarn Inthachot Ping of Wat Bangpakok.[14] It is unclear how or when this edition was copied from the Venerable Suk's original manuscript.

Mano claims that Chai's edition, which he used for the translation is close to the original texts. He argues that this is seen in his comparison of Chai's edition with a 1993 edition from Wat Ratchasittharam, titled *Ceto-Vimutti* or The Liberation of the Mind.[15] The contents are almost identical with the exception of the last five paragraphs omitted from Chai's version and the modern Thai spelling used in the Wat Ratchasittharam version. Dr Mano notes that the diagrams, difficult words and explanations are the same for both editions.[16]

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[14] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pg. 9.

[15] I have been informed by monks in Wat Ratchasittharam that this publication is out of print and not distributed by the temple anymore. What is now distributed by the temple are publications produced by *Khana* 5 under the current meditation teacher Luang Pho Wira who has produced books in which he has infused the teachings of the manuscript with his own interpretations, resulting in omissions or additions to the original manuscript. The 1993 edition from Wat Ratchasittharam is a reprinted publication from funeral booklets produced by a layperson of high social status named Khunluang Phisandarunkon. This was done in an attempt to preserve ancient teachings and transfer merit for his deceased mother in preparation for her funeral in 1935. He had received the original manuscripts from the abbot and head of the meditation system at Wat Ratchasittharam named Chum, who was also his meditation instructor. The original manuscripts were in brittle condition and he had since 1913 attempted to reproduce

Distinctive Features of the Manuscript

I will now examine the distinctive features of the manuscript derived from Dr Mano's translated version. The entire manuscript comprises of **three parts**. It is a composite text with various interpolations and extensions.[17]

The **first part** of the manuscript contains **two sections:**[18]

1. Verses to be recited in rituals associated with initiation and the meditation practice

The initiation ritual first commences in Pali with an explanation in Thai after. The title for this section is called the *Maggapālimuta* and the initiation rite for meditation. This term *Maggapālimuta* refers to an initiation into a tradition outside the Pali text.[19]

The purpose of the initiation is to seek permission to be accepted into the school of meditation and become formally accepted as a disciple. The initiate is to beg forgiveness for past misdeeds and not to commit future transgressions. This is followed by a Pali chant with an explanation in Thai before commencing meditation. The purpose of the chant is to set the resolution to work hard against mental afflictions that would disturb one's peace of mind while in meditation.

2. General overview of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* meditation

The body of the text is largely derived from the *Visuddhimagga*. While it provides a general overview of various Pali terms relating to meditation, it does not

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[17] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 316.

[18] In Mano's doctoral dissertation, the first part of the manuscript consists of 49 out of

give actual techniques or step-by-step instructions in contrast to modern day meditation do-it-yourself books.

In the aspect of *samatha* training, the manuscript emphasizes the importance of purifying one's moral conduct first, through the observance of precepts, abandoning the ten impediments[20] that would distract one's metal concentration, and the need to seek a good meditation instructor who is compared to a good friend or *kalyāṇamitta*. Possessing the qualities of a good friend, the meditation teacher should thus be familiar with the temperament of his student and chose a specific meditation object that is suitable for him. After being instructed in the meditation object that is used for *samādhi*, the student should proceed to look for a conducive place for practice. Like the *Visuddhimagga*, the manuscript lists forty subjects to choose from.[21]

I note that references pertaining to the role of the teacher and his ability to discern the psyche of his student and chose an appropriate meditation subject is often mentioned throughout the manuscript.[22] This indicates the importance placed on personal supervision under a qualified instructor at the time when the original manuscript was written.

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[20] The ten impediments according to the *Visuddhimagga* refers to: Dwelling, family, students, building work, travel, kin, meaning parents, teachers, pupils or close friends; illness, the study of scriptures and supernormal powers.

[21] The forty types of meditation techniques are categorized into seven groups. 1) Ten techniques of intensive contemplation, 2) Ten techniques of contemplation on loathsome objects, 3) Ten methods of recollection, 4) Four quarters of universal expansion of benevolent will, 5) The cultivation of loathsome awareness in physical and psychological nutrients, 6) The analysis of elements, 7) The four categories of formless contemplation.

Like the *Visuddhimagga*, besides a comprehensive description of each of the forty subjects of meditation, the text also provides a description of the six categories of human temperament and which meditational object is suitable for that particular personality trait.[23]

The text examines the three stages one would expect to attain as one progresses in *samādhi*.[24] Progression through each of these three stages is dependent on the type of meditational object chosen and the text explains which object is suitable for that particular stage. It also mentions that progression along the form to the formless attainments depends also on the type of meditational subject chosen. It also provides a brief description of how to identify *jhāna* when it is attained. This is observed with the arising of the five factors and the successive elimination of each of these factors as one progresses in meditative absorption.[25]

In the aspect of *vipassanā* or insight meditation, there are again close references to the *Visuddhimagga* as observed from much emphasis dedicated to explaining the seven kinds of purification.[26] In essence, this is a breakdown of the purification of oneself from external actions to internal thoughts, desires, cumulating in the elimination of ignorance, the attainment of release from suffering

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[23] The six categories are as follows: *Rāga* (greedy), *Dosa* (hating), *Moha* (deluded), *Saddhā* (faithful), *Buddhi* (intellectual) and *Vitakka* (speculative).

[24] This breakdown is also similar to the *Visuddhimagga* in its concepts of sizing (*parikamma*) cultivation, accessing (*upacāra*) cultivation and penetrating (*appanā*) cultivation, marking the stages of the mind as it develops from the initial ordinary level of concentration, to bordering on *jhāna* absorption and then entry into *jhāna* absorption.

[25] The five factors comprise of initiated thought, sustained thought, ecstasy, bliss and equanimity.

[26] The seven kinds of purification are: 1) Purity of morality 2) Purity of mind 3) Purity of view 4) Purity of having crossed over doubt 5) Purity of the knowledge and vision of what is path

and becoming a 'noble one'. There are also short references made to the three characteristics of existence,[27] the ten transcendental knowledges[28] and the three forms of liberation.[29]

The second part of the manuscript is the shortest of the three parts.[30]

Its main focus deals with the description of the five joys (*pīti*). Again, the text does not provide the reader with instruction on the techniques one should employ to attain the five joys.[31] In my impression, the fact that information on the five joys occupies a separate second part in the manuscript indicates the importance of this experience to the practitioner of this meditation system. According to Mano, the importance placed on the five joys represents a unique development in the interpretation of meditation experience in Thailand where the feeling of joy is treated with great respect and reverence.[32] This is seen in the fact

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[27] The three characteristics of existence are: impermanence, suffering and selflessness.

[28] The ten transcendental knowledges comprise of: 1) Knowing the natural characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction and selflessness 2) Knowing the natural characteristics of the rise and fall 3) knowing the natural characteristics of decay 4) knowing the natural characteristics of all things as objects of woe 5) Knowing the natural characteristics of all things as disadvantages 6) Knowing the natural characteristics of all things as objects of dispassion 7) Knowing the inspiration for liberation 8) Knowing the reflections of all things 9) Knowing equanimity in all things 10) Knowing the regularity of all things.

[29] This refers to liberation through voidness, liberation through absence of mind-object and liberation through the absence of desire.

[30] In Mano's translated edition, it comprises only of 6 pages out of 149 pages (4%). Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp. 82-87.

[31] Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* mentions the practitioner experiencing the five joys as stages of increasing ecstasy before reaching the threshold of *jhāna*. See Gethin 1998: pp. 181-182.

[32] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 82 (Fn. no.257). Even Buddhadāsa, in one of his sermons

that all of the five joys are bestowed the title 'Sacred', as translated from the Thai language- *Phra* and *Chao*.[33]

The five joys are named as follows:

- The Sacred Minor Joy (Thai: *Phra Khutthaka Piti Cao*, Pali: *Khuddakā-pīti*)
- The Sacred Momentary Joy (Thai: *Phra Khanika Piti Cao*, Pali: *Khaṇikā-pīti*)
- The Sacred Flooding Joy (Thai: *Phra Okkantika Piti Cao*, Pali: *Okkantikā-pīti*)
- The Sacred Thrillsome Joy (Thai: *Phra Upphengkha Piti Cao*, Pali: *Ubbeṅga-pīti*)
- The Sacred Pervading Joy (Thai: *Phra Pharana Piti Cao*, Pali: *Pharaṇā-pīti*)

The manuscript gives a brief rundown of the nature of ecstasy experienced in each of the joys. Often, imagery is used to describe the sensation. For instance, for the Sacred Flooding Joy, the feeling is compared to the bursting of bubbles.

Each of the five joys can be substituted with corresponding colours, elements, number of attributes of the element, Buddhas of the aeon and their animal symbols as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: The Five Joys and their Five Attributes

Type of Joy	Colour	Element	No. of Attributes of the Elements	Buddha	Animal Symbol
Minor	White	Earth	21	*Kukkusando*	Cockerel
Momentary	Red	Fire	6	*Konāgamana*	Serpent
Overwhelming	Yellow, Pinky Violet, Crystal green	Water	12	*Kassapa*	Turtle
Bouncing	Grayish White	Wind	7	*Gotama*	Bull
Pervading	Aquamarine, olive green, jade green	Ethereal	10	*Metteyya*	Lion King

The manuscript emphasizes that the total sum of the number of attributes of the elements adds up to fifty-six, which it claims to be the number representing the Buddha. This esoteric interpretation is not alluded to in the canonical scriptures where the conventional number of attributes of the Buddha is usually nine.[34] It is

[34] The nine attributes are: *Arahaṁ*-Accomplished, *Sammāsambuddho*-Perfectly Enlightened, *Vijjā Caraṇa Sampanno - Endowed with* knowledge and Conduct or Practice, *Sugato* -

suggested that mastering the five joys in one's meditation practice enables one to correspondingly attain the qualities of the Buddha as well.

The **third part** is the longest of the three in the manuscript.[35]

The teachings are alien to the Pali canon and the commentaries, unlike the first part of the manuscript, which is to a large extent derived from the *Visuddhimagga*. The third part uses concentration or *samādhi* for healing physical and mental afflictions for oneself and others, solving problems in life and reducing pain and discomfort. The text describes nine bases from the nose tip to the navel and provides advice on which base to focus one's concentration on for the appropriate treatment.[36] Treatment is also facilitated via the use of Pali mantras, visualization of sacred diagrams (Thai: *Yan*, derived from the Sanskrit word *Yantra*), Khmer (*Khom*) syllables and bodily postures.

Each of the nine bases has specific characteristics and locations as seen in Table 3:[37]

Buddho - Enlightened, and *Bhagavā*-Blessed. Web Source: http://thebuddhisttemple.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid =72 [2011, 4 February].

[35] It comprises of 95 pages out of 149 pages (63%) in Mano's translated edition. Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp. 89-183.

[36] In the manuscript, the Nine Bases are referred to in Thai as *Phra Nawaraharakhun* (พระนวรหรคุณ).

Table 3: The Nine Bases and their Location/Properties

Bases	Location	Properties
9	Nose tip	Origin of joy and awareness of birth
8	Between eyes	Origin of wisdom, seeing all falsehood
7	Between brows	Destroys all harm, origin of power and authority
6	Top of head	Home of forbearance
5	Between head and neck	Sanctuary from pain and evil
4	Center of throat	Origin of the sleeping, tastelessness, point of breaking apart of thoughts and the truth of cessation
3	The heart	Mixing place of wholesome and unwholesome thoughts
2	One finger-breadth over navel	Origin of evil thoughts
1	Navel	Quenching all pain

The text mentions that it is a teaching separate from the Pali tradition and practiced by ancient masters in the olden days.[38] The author of the text states that the practitioner who is qualified to conduct this method of healing is one who has mastered both *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation. This would imply that it is a higher, more advanced level of meditation.

I have identified two main approaches to the treatment, which are laid out in this third part of the manuscript.

The first approach is the use of concentration derived from *samatha* training to treat element imbalance. The elements are the foundation of physical existence and make up the basic constituents of the body, namely; earth, fire, water and wind. The manuscript contains diagrams showing the arrangement of these four elements in spheres side by side each other in a circular format suspended in space. This placement is a reflection of their natural state, and perceived by the meditation practitioner during intense states of concentration.

The texts state that if any of the elements were not balanced, meaning too much or too little of any one type, illness would arise.[39] The concentrated mind is able to shift or move the position of any one of the elements, if necessary, to assist in balancing one over another. The concentrated mind is also used to incubate the body's elements at a specific base until they are in balance again. It appears that this technique prevents the elements from breaking up or slowly disintegrating, which would lead to the deterioration of the body and eventual death. Despite this

[38] Mettanando Bhikkh 1998: p. 90.

[39] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 153. This belief is shared in traditional Thai methods of healing where the human body comprises of four elements- water, fire, wind and earth, and that disease is simply a derangement in the proportions of these elements. Tiyavanich 2003: pp. 227

instruction, the manuscript does not give detailed instructions on how the practitioner is first able to perceive this elemental sphere within his own body.

The second approach is via the use of the concentrated mind to assist in the movement of energy or life force along the different bases to facilitate healing. This energy is referred to in Thai as *lom* or wind in the manuscript. Energy which is considered unclean or diseased and the cause of the illness is expelled through exhalation or via the anus. In this aspect, illness is related to the stagnancy of 'wind' in the body, which might not circulate properly due to blockages as a result of various emotional and mental distresses.

An interesting notion on the use of the nine bases is how the diseased energy can also be moved by the concentrated mind to any one of these bases to be neutralized. For instance, the pain of snakebite or a sharp pain in the flank can be eliminated by moving the pain to base four and seven respectively as the characteristics of these bases deal with cessation and the destruction of harm (refer to the table above).[40]

Analysis of the manuscript in the context of the *Yogāvacara* tradition

I will now analyze Venerable Suk's manuscript and determine to what extent it can be identified with the *Yogāvacara* tradition based on Crosby's definition.

The first part of the manuscript reveals that before the practitioner can commence with the meditation practice, an initiation ritual is required. This fits

into Crosby's **point number 6 (The necessity for an initiation ritual)**. In the manuscript, the Pali term *ukāsa* is frequently used at the start of the liturgy for the initiation ritual. In Bizot's research on liturgies for ordination into various *Yogāvacara* lineages, he has noted frequent use of the term *ukāsa*, which he translates as 'please grant permission'. It is used in the context of a potential student addressing his senior meditation instructor. This term is alien to the Pali canon, commentaries and subcommentaries. Instead, Bizot argues that it is of Mon origin.[41] Research into *Yogāvacara* traditions of Sri Lanka and Northern Thailand have shown similarities in rituals conducted in the initiation such as the student's homage to five gems rather than the standard three gems.[42] The five gems are the *Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha*, the meditation subject and the meditation teacher. This homage to the five gems is also found in the liturgy for initiation, in the first part of Venerable Suk's manuscript.[43]

While the first part of the manuscript adheres to the 'orthodox' *Visuddhimagga* in the use of *samādhi* and *vipassanā* as part of normative meditation training for mental purification, the third part involves more worldly concerns such as healing and solving life problems. Thus, unlike modern conceptions of 'orthodox' Buddhist meditation, spiritual practices in the manuscript are not just for soteriological purposes. This fits into Crosby's definition in **point number 7 (Meditation practices not just for soteriological, but for worldly ends too)**. An overview of treatments and problems to be solved suggests that it is meant for a monk undertaking a journey into the forest. This is because the problems that can be addressed involve protection against the attacks of ferocious beasts, how to cure and alleviate venomous bites from snakes, how to predict if undertaking an

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[41] Crosby 2000: pp. 152, 178.

[42] Crosby 2000: p. 187

impending forest journey is safe and the measures one should undertake to ensure that it is so.[44]

It is interesting to note that in the list of worldly concerns that can be mitigated using this meditation technique, treatments involving healing one's own children, curing a baby and increasing the flavor of food are included.[45] These concerns are not usual for an ordained monk. Besides healing, the techniques mentioned in the third part of the manuscript also include protection against enemies and the use of loving-kindness to ward off past enmity or potential attacks. In my opinion, this suggests that practitioners who have reached a high level in this meditation system are not necessarily monks, but also lay people. This fits Crosby's point number 11 (Expertise in *Yogāvacara* tradition not restricted to monks but to lay people too).

The first part of the manuscript describes the different meditation subjects (total of forty) that would enable the practitioner to access the appropriate *jhāna* state. What I find intriguing is the claim that the ten techniques of intensive contemplation (*kasiṇa*) and breathing mindfulness (*ānāpana-sati*) would facilitate one in reaching the fifth *jhanic* state, which in the manuscript is deemed the highest of the form absorptions.[46] This is clearly not part of the categorization of the Pali *suttas* or the *Visuddhimagga*, which states that there are four *jhāna* states in the realm of form.[47] Traditional Theravāda teaching states that the techniques on intensive contemplation and breathing mindfulness would assist one in reaching the fourth *jhāna*, which is highest realm of form. I note that the concept of the fifth

[44] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp. 130, 139, 140, 175, 133, 166, 134, 135, 152, 157, 159, 165, 142 and 156.

[45] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp. 128, 143 and 111.

jhāna is also found in the Sri Lankan meditation manuscript, the *Yogāvacara* Manual. This manual was mentioned in the works of Crosby as part of her understanding of the *Yogāvacara* tradition in the Theravāda world.[48] The concept of the fifth *jhāna* was first mentioned in the *Dhammasaṅganī*, which is the first of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma*.[49] As such, this demonstrates the important influence of the *Abhidhamma* philosophy in explaining the technicalities of Venerable Suk's meditation system and the 'unorthodox' variation to the *samādhi/vipassanā* notion of Buddhist meditation compared to the *Visuddhimagga*. This corresponds to Crosby's **point number 9 (The importance of the *Abhidhamma*)** and 10 (***samādhi* and *vipassanā* not interpreted based on the *Visuddhimagga*)**.

Crosby's **point number 4 (the substitution of items)** is evident in the second part of Venerable Suk's manuscript. This is seen in the substitution of the five joys with colours, elements, number of attributes of the elements, Buddhas of the aeon and their animal symbols.

The importance of the practitioner experiencing the five joys is emphasized as seen in the comparison of the five joys to the five elements (earth, fire, water, wind and space), which possess attributes totaling fifty-six. The text claims that these attributes are equivalent to the number of attributes of the Buddha himself. What this implies is that training oneself according to the teachings of this school of meditation would result in placing and recognizing within ones body the qualities of the Buddha, facilitating the progression towards

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[48] The Sri Lankan manuscript was discovered by Anagarika H. Dharmapala in 1892 and passed on to Davids who transliterated the Pali and Sinhalese words into Roman letters. He called this work the *Yogāvacara* Manual, which was first published in 1896. For more information, see Davids, T.W. Rhys. *The Yogāvacara's Manual of Indian Mysticism as Practiced by Buddhists.*

enlightenment. In my opinion, this corresponds to Crosby's point number 1 (replacing one's unenlightened self with the qualities of the Buddha).

A pervading theme commonly found in the third part of Venerable Suk's manuscript is the location of abstract Buddhist concepts as tangible objects along specific points of the human body. This is unheard of in 'orthodox' Theravāda Buddhism. For example, the fourth of the nine bases, located at the center of the throat is where the 'truth of cessation' is positioned.[50] This is the third of the noble truths expounded by the Buddha upon his enlightenment. This location also shares the same attributes of inducing sleep and in one treatment is used to bring a baby to sleep before administering a cure.[51] In another example, the seven factors of enlightenment are employed to encounter a black magic spell.[52] The seven factors are found in the Pali canon and Buddhist 'orthodoxy' as a list of mental qualities and progressive steps to be developed sequentially.[53] When developed and cultivated, they lead to full awakening.[54] In the case of encountering a black magic spell, Venerable Suk's manuscript places these seven factors within seven of the nine bases, located along the human body for the neutralization of all negative energies.

These two examples show that Buddhist terminology as found in the scriptures is removed and/or expanded from its original context and applied for practical usage in the society. This conforms to Crosby's point number 5 (an esoteric interpretation of Buddhist concepts that have an otherwise standard meaning in 'orthodox' Theravāda Buddhism).

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[50] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 103.

[51] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 143.

[52] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 152.

[53] Shankman 2008: p. 18.

Conclusion

My analysis of Venerable Suk's manuscript reveals that it conforms to at least eight of the eleven factors based on Crosby's definition of the *Yogāvacara* tradition. The evidence thus points to the fact that it should be considered part of this spiritual tradition that was once the dominant practice in pre-modern Theravāda Buddhist countries of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.

5

The *Matchima* Meditation System as a 'Living Tradition'

Introduction

In examining the *Matchima*[1] meditation system as a 'living tradition', I approached it from multiple facets with the aim of obtaining a holistic understanding of the meditation system taught in today's context. This included aspects, which I consider essential to what I define as a 'living tradition'. In my opinion, a 'living tradition' includes both the tangible and abstract materials and resources used to propagate a custom, tradition or practice. This should include five aspects: physical space, perceptions of history, the philosophy, pedagogical methods and the perspectives of the practitioners themselves as shown in Table 4.

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[1] *Matchima* is derived from the Pali word *Majjhima*, meaning middle, appropriate or 'just right'. I choose to use the Thai word *Matchima* instead of the Pali term *Majjhima* when referring to

Table 4: The 'Living Tradition'- Facets, Details and Approach

	Facets	Details	Approach
The 'living tradition'	Physical space	Examine layout of temple and the section (*Khana* 5) that teaches it	Field-work
	Perceptions of history	Examine the origins of the meditation system and the biography of the Venerable Suk who propagated it	Temple publications
	Philosophy	Examine the technical aspects and teachings of the Matchima meditation system	Temple books/consultations with instructor
	Pedagogical methods	Observations of the initiation ceremony and how the system is taught on the ground	Field-work/interviews/personal observations
	Practitioners	Examine the motivations and reasons for their devotion to the practice	Interviews/questionnaire

Physical Space

The physical space includes the layout of the temple and the section (*khana*/คณะ) teaching *Machima* meditation. These are laden with meanings, which provide some insight into the importance of the meditation system to the practitioners.

Wat Ratchasittharam

Wat Ratchasittharam is located at the Thonburi side of Bangkok. It is considered a second-class royal temple founded by King Rama I.[2] Originally named Wat Phlab, it was an abandoned temple that had existed since Ayutthaya times but rose to prominence when Venerable Suk was invited to became its first abbot. The temple was a well-known center for meditation training during the early Bangkok period. Historical documents archived in the temple include letters written by its abbots recommending their pupils to study at the temple and diaries written by monks recording their meditation experiences there.[3] A visitor walking near the entrance of the temple would also notice a signboard stating that this was where the Kings Rama II, III and IV had studied and practiced meditation. See fig. 2.

Figure 2: Signboard at Wat Ratchasittharam

Photo: Patrick Ong 2010

[2] Some brief information about the temple found at My Buddha 108 website:

By walking around the temple compound and casually chatting with some of the residential monks and *maechis*, one would be able to identify the meditation huts (*kutis*) used by King Rama III and King Rama IV when they were trained in meditation at the temple. See fig. 3.

Figure 3: Meditation huts of King Rama III and King Rama IV

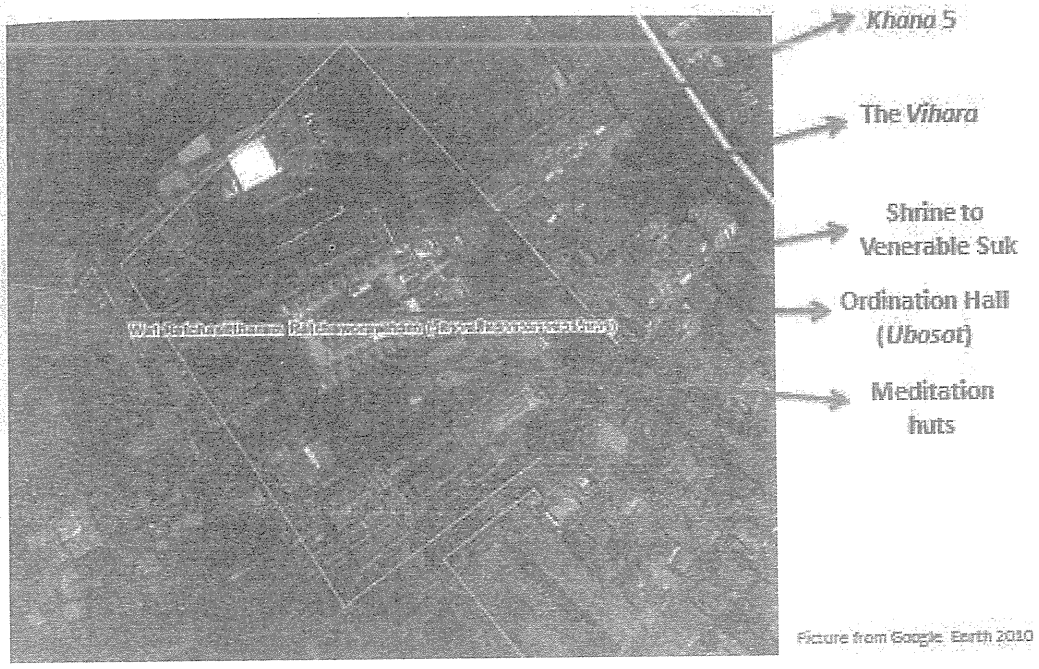
Meditation hut used by King Rama III

Meditation hut used by King Rama IV

Photo: Patrick Ong 2010

The main section of the temple comprises the ordination hall (*ubosot*) in the center, flanked by two large *chedis* in the front. There are twenty-four meditation huts (*kutis*) along the perimeter of the ordination hall, shaped in a rectangular layout. See Fig. 4.

Figure 4: Layout of Wat Ratchasittharam



Although Wat Ratchasittharam (Wat Phlab) first functioned as a royal temple during the time of King Rama I, many features that are visible today were constructed during the time of King Rama III. For instance, there are numerous Chinese statuettes placed on the ground, surrounding the ordination hall. These are similar to those seen in Wat Pho.[4] See Fig. 5.

[4] A resident monk I interviewed mentioned that King Rama III was impressed with

Figure 5: Chinese statuettes around the temple

Chinese statuettes placed around the courtyard surrounding the ordination hall during the reign of King Rama III

Photo: Patrick Ong 2010

The front entrance of the ordination hall, located between the two *chedis*, houses a shrine to the Venerable Suk. The image in the shrine was built by King Rama III when he was still Prince Jessadabodindra, during the second reign, in honor of his late preceptor. This shrine is watched over by the temple's *maechis* who take separate shifts in the day to attend to lay devotees and clean the shrine. I spoke to an elderly *maechi* named *Maechi* Chinda (แม่ชีจินดา), seventy-eight years of age, on duty one afternoon. From her, I learnt that the miniature huts around the ordination hall were meditation *kutis* formally used by monks. These meditation huts were built during the time of King Rama III.

A close observation of each of the huts indicates that they have not been utilized for a long period of time. I note that all the huts are padlocked. See Fig. 6.

Figure 6: Meditation huts around the ordination hall

The meditation huts located around the ordination hall.
They are not actively used today as observed from the padlocks on the door

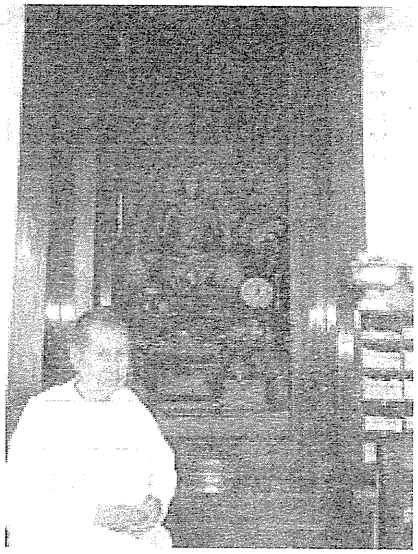
Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

This was confirmed by *Maechi* Chinda who claims to have been living in the temple since 1964. She recalled that when she first arrived and took up residence at the temple, the only a few of the huts were used for meditation, and even then, they were seldom utilized.

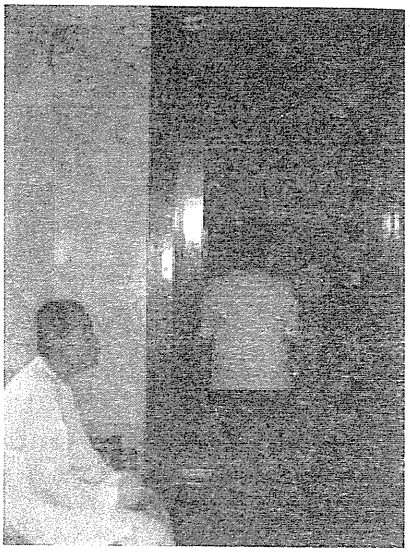
I also spoke with a few lay people who were paying their respects at the Venerable Suk shrine. One woman I spoke to was not aware about the technical aspects of the *Matchima* meditation technique and inquired whether it merely

entailed following the breath in and out of the nostrils. It is obvious that quite a number of devotees who pay respects at the shrine do so to receive blessings and advice. This was seen in the use of fortune telling sticks with their fortune slips of paper located on the right of the shrine meant to predict and provide answers to mundane concerns in everyday life. See Fig. 7.

Figure 7: *Maechi* Chinda on duty at the Venerable Suk's shrine



The elderly *Maechi* Chinda on duty. Note the slips of fortune paper on the right



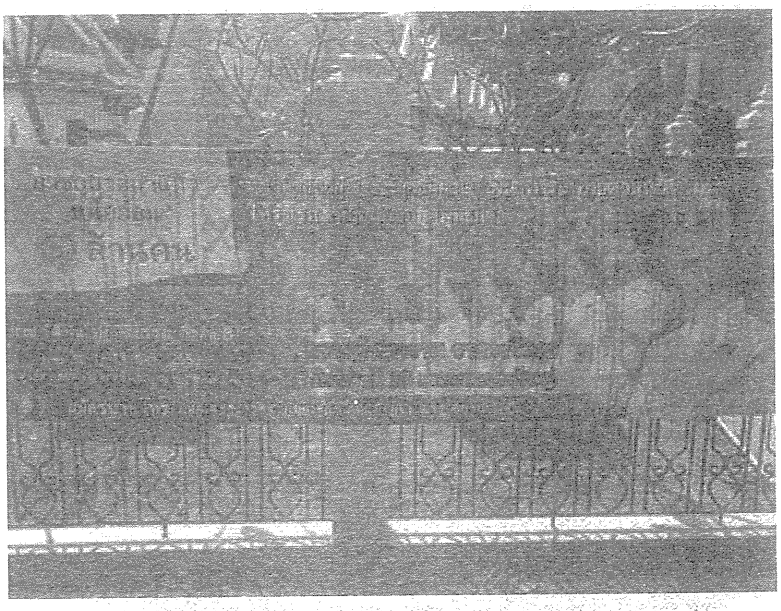
A lay devotee paying respects and seeking blessings at the miniature shrine.

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

This indicates that devotees who patronize the temple are not necessarily meditation practitioners, but are drawn to the fame and charisma of the first abbot Suk Kaithuean, who despite his passing, continues to serve as an ongoing 'field-of-merit'.

In one of my trips to the temple, I noticed an advertisement by Wat Dhammakāya in the form of a banner placed at the entrance of Wat Ratchasittharam. The banner invited women to become ordained as white robed practitioners and take the eight precepts for fourteen days starting in December 2010 in Wat Ratchasittharam. This was part of a nationwide effort by Wat Dhammakāya to ordain one million people. It is expected that the ordained should be trained in *Dhammakāya* meditation. See Fig. 8.

Figure 8: Advertisement by Wat Dhammakāya



Advertisement by Wat Dhammakāya promoting its meditation system in front of Wat Ratchasittharam

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

The fact that a contemporary meditation system is promoting its practice in the same premises of what was once an important center teaching an older

contemporary meditation systems in their attempt to dominate Buddhist practice in Thailand.

Layout of the meditation center- Khana 5 (กนษ) or Section 5

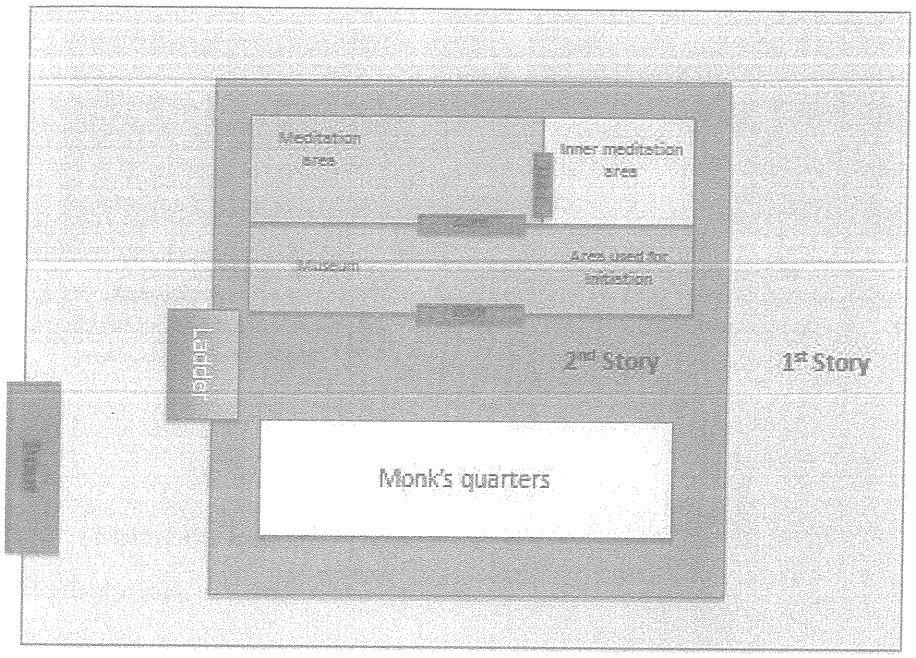
Khana 5 is currently the only section of the temple that teaches *Machima* meditation. There are in total ten *khanas* that surround the perimeter of the main temple ground. The other nine *khanas* currently teach the scriptures and Pali language. Some practitioners I interviewed claim that these other *khanas* used to teach *Machima* meditation in the past, but have ceased to do so as the heads of these *khanas*, who were meditation teachers, passed on, and there were no suitable successors to replace them.

The meditation quarters of *Khana* 5 are located on the second floor, comprising of three rooms directly opposite the monk's quarters, where the residential teacher, Luang Pho Wira resides. The rooms are organized in such a way that one has to cross the first two rooms in order to enter the third and innermost room. It is not a particularly big area (around 60 square meters). The first room is divided into two sections. One end houses the museum and its artifacts while the other contains a golden Buddha image and an open area for conducting the initiation ceremony. The second room contains more Buddha images and images of the Venerable Suk. Practitioners use this room for ceremonial purposes, group chanting, meditation and undertaking the eight precepts from Luang Pho Wira.

The innermost room is the smallest of the three rooms and houses the largest and most lifelike image of the Venerable Suk seated on a raised platform with miniature chickens around him. This room is meant for practitioners who come individually to hone their practice. Practitioners I spoke to claim that this was

spiritual support from the image of the Venerable Suk gazing at them from across the room. See Fig. 9 for a plan of *Khana* 5 and pictures of the compound.

Figure 9: Layout of *Khana* 5 and Pictures



layout design by Patrick Ong 2010

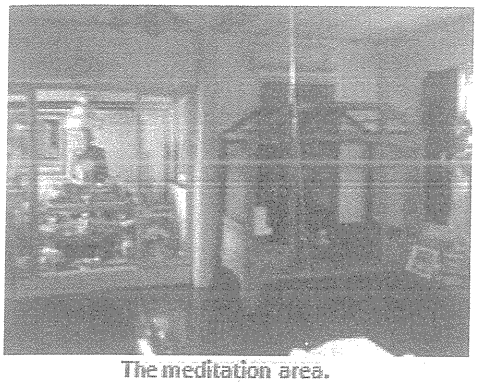
The entrance gate to *khana* 5. The poster reads: "You are invited to practice meditation at *khana* 5."

The ground floor of the *khana* 5 with several images of Venerable Suk and other images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and renowned teachers.

The museum located on the second floor.

The initiation room, located on the opposite side of the museum.

Pictures: Patrick Ong 2010



The meditation area.

The inner meditation area with an image of Venerable Suk gazing upon the practitioners.

Pictures: Patrick Ong 2010

Besides the main meditation instructor Luang Pho Wira, there are about nine other monks, one *maechi*, and one novice residing in *Khana* 5. They are in their early twenties to fifties and are currently learning *Matchima* meditation from him. One novice monk I spoke to claimed to have been ordained at another temple, but after a few years chose to stay at Wat Ratchasittharam as he was interested in learning this ancient meditation system.

Perceptions of history

How practitioners perceive the meditation system's origins, history and lineage is paramount to understanding the importance of the *Matchima* system to them. Under this section, I will also examine how the Venerable Suk, who is an

important lineage bearer of the *Matchima* meditation system, is regarded. I believe this will also shed insights as to why practitioners believe that practicing this ancient meditation system is important for their own spiritual development.

Historical perception of *Matchima* meditation has been fueled by discourse created by *Khana* 5. This is seen in books written and compiled by the meditation instructor, Luang Pho Wira, containing information about the origins of the meditation system and the life of Venerable Suk. The most important are three books entitled, 'The history of Somdet Sangkharat Suk Kaithuean'. Each book provides a linear account of the Venerable Suk's life divided into three eras, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin.[5] Another book that also contains extensive information about the origins the meditation system is entitled, 'The history of the transmission of the meditation system'.[6] These books were all published in 2009.

In my conversations with Luang Pho Wira, he claimed that it took a total of twenty years for him to publish Venerable Suk's biography. The collection of data involving Venerable Suk's life entailed extensive research into history books, old temple publications, mulberry paper manuscripts (*samut khoi*), letters written by monks and oral histories transmitted by his teachers and senior monks of the temple.

I have observed that these four books are usually distributed to new practitioners of the meditation system immediately after their initiation, or to visitors who have come to enquire about it. In view of this, I shall provide a summary of these four books. See Fig.10.

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[5] พระประวัติสมเด็จพระสังฆราชสุก ไก่เถื่อน ยุคกรุงศรีอยุธยา, ยุคกรุงธนบุรี, ยุคกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์. See Thai references for more details.

[6] ตำนานการสืบทอด พระกรรมฐาน มัชฌิมา แบบลำดับ ของพระราหุลเถรเจ้า. See Thai references for more details.

Figure 10: Books produced by the temple

Books publishedby the temple on the biography of the Venerable Suk and the history of the *Matchima* meditation system

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

Perceptions of the Matchima meditation system

The narrative provided by the temple books state that theoretical information about *Matchima* meditation can be found in the scriptures like the Pali canon and commentarial material such as the Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification) and the Vimuttimagga (Path of Liberation).[7] Besides these well-known Buddhist texts, the books also claim that the theory of the meditation system is found in indigenous meditation texts. One noteworthy text frequently mentioned is the *Mūla*

[7] The former was written by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century the latter by Upatissa around the 3rd century. Both were Sri Lankan monks who were from rival Buddhist traditions, the *Mahavihara* and the *Abhayagiri* respectively.

Kammaṭhan (มูลกัมมัฏฐาน), composed by a monk from Lanna some 1,600 years ago. While it makes references to the canonical text and commentaries, it also includes a record of the author's meditative experiences. The *Mūla Kammaṭhan* was a popular meditation manual studied during the Ayutthaya period by monks seeking theoretical knowledge in meditation practice. The importance of this text to the *Matchima* meditation system now taught at Wat Ratchasittharam can be seen from a palm leaf manuscript displayed at the museum located at *Khana* 5. This manuscript was recopied from a much older version during the time when the Venerable Suk was the abbot at Wat Ratchasittharam. See Fig. 11.

Figure 11: The *Mūla Kammaṭhan* Manuscript

The *Mūla Kammaṭhan* manuscript written on plam leaves during the time when the Venerable Suk was the abbot of Wat Ratchasittharam

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

The practical aspect of *Matchima* meditation comprising of techniques and technical instruction has been transmitted and imparted orally via an unbroken lineage of teachers. Disciples and potential teachers would memorize the instructions and the interpretations of the visions or *nimits* (Pali: *nimittas*) one would encounter as one progresses in meditation. This was not recorded in texts due to the need to protect future practitioners from imagining the *nimits* instead of actually experiencing them. Imagining these visions or *nimits* would hinder one's spiritual progress. As we shall observer later, this aspect of an unbroken lineage is vital to the identity shared by *Matchima* meditation practitioners

Ideally, both theory and practice should complement each other so that the practitioner gains an in-depth knowledge of what the mind experiences while progressing through the various stages during meditation.

The 'unbroken' lineage from the Venerable Rāhula to Venerable Suk

The 'living tradition' claims that the first teacher who received personal instructions on the *Matchima* meditation system directly from the Buddha was his son Rāhula. He is the thus the first ancestor to inherit this system. Two and a half centuries later, this teaching was transmitted to Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia via teachers from the same lineage.

This occurred in 256 BC when the emperor Asoka dispatched the Venerables Sona and Utttra to spread Buddhism and the practice of *Matchima* meditation to the region of Suvannabhumi (the Land of Gold). These are the countries of Thailand, Burma, Laos, southern Vietnam and Cambodia. Today, with the exception of Thailand, transmission of the complete meditation system was

discontinued in these countries once they had fallen to communist or authoritarian regimes

In Thailand, *Matchima* meditation was taught in temples over different historical eras. It is noted that in each era, there is always a main center and other smaller centers or temples teaching this system. For instance, in the Suvannabhumi era, the main center was at Wat Tao Uthong, located at the city of Uthong.[8] In the Dvaravati era, the main center was at Wat Saen Tao Khoton. During the Sukhothai era, the main center was Wat Pakaew. By the time of Ayutthaya, Wat Pakaew continued as the main center for meditation instruction under the monks of the forest order. It was also known as Wat Chao Phayathai. The Sangharat or Supreme Patriarch of the left section (the forest order), holding the title Phra Phonarat, was the chief instructor of the *Matchima* meditation system. Towards the end of the Ayutthaya era, around the time when the Venerable Suk was born, there were many smaller temples teaching this system besides the main center at Wat Pakaew (Wat Chao Phayathai). One of the smaller temples teaching *Matchima* meditation was Wat Tha Hoy.

Wat Tha Hoy was a small village temple located within the district of Tha Khoy, outside the walls of the city of Ayutthaya.[9] Before the fall of Ayutthaya, this village temple was a satellite of a much larger temple in the vicinity, known as Wat Rong Chang. It did not possess an ordination hall and laymen who wanted to become ordained as monks and reside at Wat Tha Hoy had to be ordained at Wat

[8] The Venerables Sona and Uttra were the first abbots and the principal teachers.

[9] It was originally named Wat Tha Khoy, but was altered by Cham pronunciation to Wat Tha Hoy during the Thonburi era as Cham people resettled the village after the Burmese invasion of Ayutthaya. The temple has a special affinity with Venerable Suk's family as it was his grandfather who had built it during the time of King Narai. This temple was also known to have interred the ashes of his ancestors.

Rong Chang. Those who chose to become monks and learn *Matchima* meditation had to travel to the main center of meditation, Wat Pakaew, located within the walls of the city to be initiated by the head of the meditation system, Phra Phonarat. They would then return to their village temples to be further instructed by their own meditation instructors. This was seen in the case of the Venerable Suk when he was ordained in 1754 at the age of twenty-two.

Newell speculates that Wat Tha Hoy was the main center of meditation instruction in the Ayutthaya period and was in fact Wat Chao Phayathai or Wat Pakaew. Her speculation arose from a conversation with a 'senior Bangkok monk'.[10] My research indicates that this is incorrect. Wat Tha Hoy, according to temple accounts only grew in significance in the aftermath of the Burmese invasion of Ayutthaya in 1767. The Burmese had destroyed and plundered Wat Chao Phayathai (Wat Pakaew) and Wat Rong Chang as they were bigger temples and had accumulated gold offered by devotees over many centuries.

During the Thonburi period, the Venerable Suk, who was appointed abbot of Wat Tha Hoy by the villagers, constructed an ordination hall at the temple and established a lineage of disciples trained in the *Matchima* tradition. Historical records also claim that the Venerable Suk had recovered several Buddha images that were still in good condition from Wat Rong Chang and Wat Chao Phayathai, and placed them at Wat Tha Hoy. The temple was thus deemed as succeeding Wat Cao Phayathai or Wat Pakaew as the next center of meditation in the region.

With the establishment of the city of Bangkok and Venerable Suk's move to Wat Ratchasittharam, Wat Tha Hoy declined in importance. By the third reign, it had become deserted. During major renovation works in 1826, King Rama III

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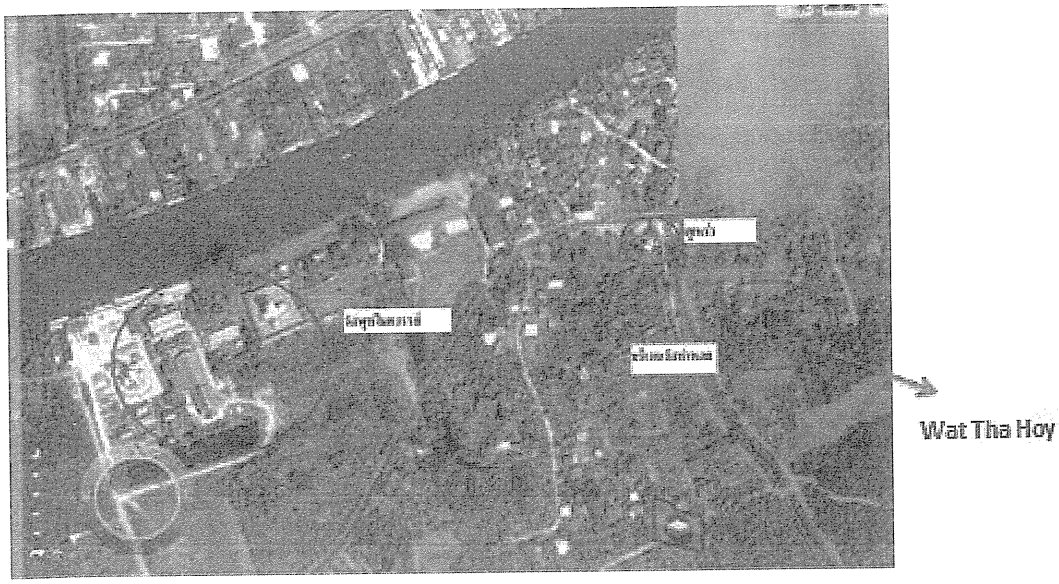
[10] Newell 2008: p. 180.

moved the Buddha images residing at Wat Tha Hoy to the twenty-four meditation huts located at Wat Ratchasittharam. Thus, it is clearly seen that the movement of the Venerable Suk to Wat Ratchasittharam and the placement of Buddha statues at the temple by King Rama III symbolized a geographical shift in the center of meditation instruction.

Nonetheless, perceptions of Wat Tha Hoy continue to play an important part in the conception of history and construction of identity for the practitioners of *Khana* 5. This is seen in the inclusion of a map placed in Wat Ratchasittharam's website pin-pointing the possible location of Wat Tha Hoy. See Fig. 12.

Figure 12: Map estimating location of Wat Tha Hoy



A map showing the approximate location of
Wat Tha Hoy in Ayutthaya province

Picture taken from temple website 2010

The *Matchima* meditation system reached the height of its popularity during the second reign. King Rama II felt that the practice of meditation had declined in quality. The fall of Ayutthaya had resulted in the rise of many meditation practices that had deviated from the original teachings. This problem was observed mainly in the outlying provinces. The king thus organized a three day conference in 1821 and appointed the Venerable Suk as the chairperson. One agenda of the conference was to appoint monks as official instructors. They were then sent to the northern and southern provinces to propagate the *Matchima* meditation system.

During the early Bangkok period, Wat Ratchasittharam was the main center of meditation instruction. Another smaller center was Wat Samorai (Wat Rachathiwat). The latter ceased to teach the *Matchima* meditation method after the death of the main meditation abbot and the proliferation of newer, more 'modern' meditation styles, which had become popular by the mid twentieth century. Today, only Wat Ratchasittharam teaches this meditation system.

Perceptions of the Venerable Suk

There is a wealth of information about the life of Venerable Suk recorded in temple books. Instead of adopting a narrative approach, I have sieved out pertinent themes in his life that have been emphasized in the temple publications. These themes include: his role as a lineage bearer, his possession of spiritual and temporal charisma, and being a teacher to renowned individuals. I deem these themes to be of significance to the 'living tradition' in order to understand the dedication of practitioners towards the *Matchima* meditation system.

The Venerable Suk was born a commoner of Thai and Chinese parentage in the obscure village of Ban Tha Khoy in 1732. When he passed on at the ripe old age of ninety in 1822, he had achieved the position of the fourth Supreme Patriarch of the Bangkok era, widely respected and revered by royalty and commoners alike and was believed to be an *Arahat*.

Temple tradition portrays him as one of the key figures in the establishment of the early Bangkok dynasty. He supported King Rama I in the establishment of 'True Buddhist' practice in the country, after a stage where Buddhism was seen to have declined soon after the fall of Ayutthaya. The Ayutthaya period was depicted as a golden age during which many monks had reached a high level of attainment in their Buddhist practice. They had reached one of the four stages of enlightenment in Buddhism, known as 'stream entry' and were considered 'noble ones'.[11] These monks were all depicted as practicing the same *Matchima* meditation system.

Lineage bearer

One main theme is the depiction of the Venerable Suk as the lineage bearer of this ancient practice. This was due to the fact that he was capable enough to master the complete *Matchima* meditation system to the highest levels and was tasked by divine instruction to propagate it in the new Bangkok era. Although there existed other monks who were equally apt in meditation, they had either perished during the Burmese onslaught or had chosen to live a solitary life in the forests.

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[11] The four stages are stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returner (*anāgāmi*) and the fully enlightened being (*arahant*).

In the first book of his autobiography, the reader is introduced to a multitude of teachers who were able to discern his innate abilities and prophesied his role in the propagation of Buddhist practice in the future.[12] His education commenced even before ordination, when he was in his teenage years. The abbot of Wat Tha Hoy then, Khrua Ta Thong, introduced him to the foundational stages of the *Matchima* system. Upon ordination, he further perfected his skills under Luang Pu Si, the abbot of Wat Rong Chang, and succeeded in attaining one of the highest levels. This was accomplished within his third year of ordination and he attained the first level of 'stream entry', becoming a *Sotāpanna*. Not neglecting the theoretical aspects of the practice, the Venerable Suk also studied the scriptures with Luang Pu In of Wat Ratchawat, the main center for scriptural learning during the Ayutthaya era. It is noted that all these teachers were part of the same forest lineage and were educated by Phra Phonarat (Paen) of Wat Pakaew during the reign of the Tiger King in the Ayutthaya era.

Besides receiving this 'formal' education in temples, the Venerable Suk was also trained by teachers he had encountered during his forest expeditions.[13] One teacher of note is Than Khrua Ta Cao, the abbot of Wat Ko Hong in the Ayutthaya era who was also a disciple of Phra Phonarat (Paen) of Wat Pakaew. The Venerable Suk met him in the forests of Thonburi while he was fleeing the Burmese army. This teacher further instructed him on the final stages of the *Matchima* system and enabled him to perfect his practice and achieve a higher level in the noble path, the status of an *Anāgāmi*.

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[12] The first book of his autobiography, 'The History of Somdet Sangkharat Suk Kai Thuean during the Ayutthaya era' (*พระประวัติสมเด็จพระสังฆราชสุก ไก่เถื่อน ยุคกรุงศรีอยุธยา*).

[13] This is a common practice by monks of the forest tradition, known as the practice of *dhūtaṅga* (Thai: *thudong*). The purpose was to use the forest as a training ground for spiritual development. These expeditions also provided the opportunity to seek out teachers residing in the forest and learn new spiritual methods from them and/or visit sacred sites.

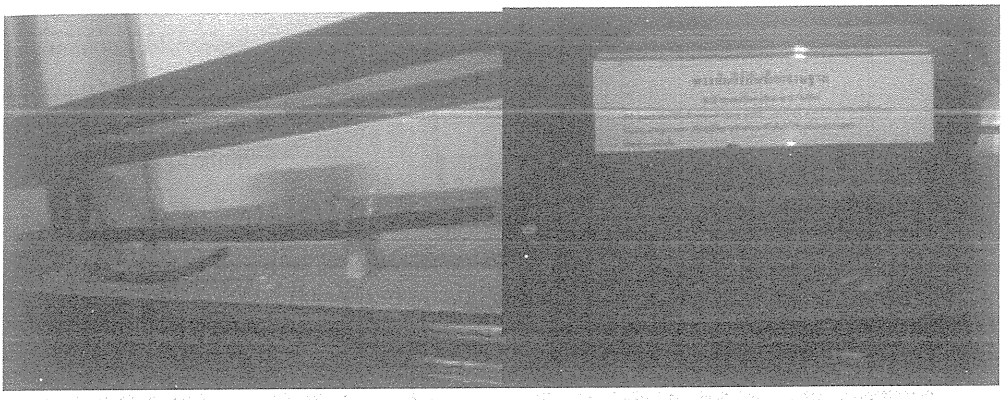
Besides teachers encountered in physical form, the Venerable Suk also met teachers who appeared to him either in visions while in meditation, or in non-physical form during forest expeditions. These teachers were the ancestors of the meditation system who had lived centuries earlier. One such teacher was Luang Pu Thao Rot who held the position of Phra Phonarat during the time when Ayutthaya was first established as the capital in the early fourteen century. These teachers helped him perfect various forms of *abhiññā* or psychic powers.[14] These supernatural skills were taught for the purpose of facilitating his propagation of the meditation system.

Besides instructing him in the various methods of practice, both the physical and non-physical teachers would also hand down tangible items that were representative of the *Matchima* meditation system, symbolically confirming him as the lineage bearer. Teachers in non-physical form would direct him to a cave where the walking stick belonging to the ancestors of the *Matchima* meditation system were hidden. One of these sticks was originally owned by the son of the Buddha, Rāhula and was passed down to the main inheritors of the meditation system. Some teachers would bequeath him manuscripts recording the meditation practice. For instance, Than Khrua Ta Cao handed him three bundles of manuscripts, one of which contained the procedure for initiation into the *Matchima* meditation system. These manuscripts had been copied and recopied from originals that had existed since the time of Sukhothai and were kept hidden when the Burmese plundered the temples and its libraries. The walking sticks and manuscripts were later brought to Wat Ratchasittharam from Wat Tha Hoy and were inherited by successive abbots of

[14] Examples range from the manipulation of elements within the body for the purpose of healing, manipulating them externally in one's environment for the purpose of traveling over water, such as rivers and streams, the ability to travel at extraordinary speed while in the forests and the ability to produce many bodies at will.

Wat Ratchasittharam. The museum in *Khana* 5 has now placed them on display. See Fig. 13.

Figure 13: The Buddha's walking stick and manuscript of initiation



The walking stick belonging to the son of the Buddha, Rāhula

The manuscript on the procedure for initiation into the *Matchimo* meditation system given to Venerable Suk by Than Khru Ta Cao

Pictures: Patrick Ong 2010

Charisma: spiritual and temporal

Another theme evident in the books is Venerable Suk's charisma seen in both the spiritual and temporal realms.

The spiritual charisma of Venerable Suk is innate as well as generated by spiritual practices. The innate characteristics arise from the accumulation of merits

from past lives. As such, his birth was heralded by the loud sounds of forest animals gathering around his family home. Animals living in the forest, believed to be more receptive and intuitive than humans, recognized this quality. They would be naturally drawn to his presence. Encounters with animals increased with the practice of the *Matchima* meditation as the system emphasized the radiation of loving-kindness as a means for the liberation of the mind (*mettā ceto-vimutti*).[15] Tigers and cobras, upon receiving his loving-kindness, would often reside around his *kuti* and offer protection. Forest fowl would follow him around and sit on his lap when he was deep in meditation. It was even said that one would know if the Venerable Suk was back from his travels if forest fowl were gathering and making loud noises outside his *kuti*. This resulted in the people calling him '*Suk Kaithuean*', meaning 'Suk of the Forest Fowl'.

Besides animals, the Venerable Suk was often depicted as able to communicate and provide assistance in the spirit realm. According to a legend, when the Venerable Suk and his three disciples first came to reside at Wat Ratchasittharam, they meditated and radiated loving-kindness around the vicinity of the temple. This was said to relieve the bad karma or misdeeds of the wandering spirits (*preta*), resulting in their rebirth in a better plane of existence. Besides spirits, the Venerable Suk was also able to communicate with *devas* of the forest and inhabitants of hidden cities that would not reveal themselves to an ordinary mortal man. Accounts of these encounters are testimony to his heightened spiritual resources.

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[15] It is noted that this is an important practice for forest monks, necessary for their survival due to chance encounters with dangerous animals while wandering in the forest. For more details, see Thitananno: 1999, p. 189.

The transference of loving-kindness was not just to animals and metaphysical beings, but also to inanimate objects. This was seen in his creation of the *Phra Arahang* or *Somdet Phra Arahang* amulets. The amulets are fashioned with the image of the Emerald Buddha, with the words '*Arahang*', meaning one who has extinguished the defilements, engraved behind. They were initially presented to King Rama I after he had came to understudy and practice the meditation system with the Venerable Suk at Wat Ratchasittharam in 1793. During the second reign, Prince Prince Jessadabodindra (King Rama III) made more copies of the *Phra Arahang* amulets. These were blessed by Venerable Suk and distributed to devotees who believed in their efficacy in warding off misfortunes.[16]

Although Venerable Suk preferred the solitude of the forest and practicing meditation alone, he is often depicted as concerned about the misfortunes of the common folk and was known to use his spiritual abilities to render assistance. During the reign of King Rama II, a cholera epidemic broke out in Bangkok resulting in the death of about thirty thousand people. The Venerable Suk tried to relieve the suffering of the people by preparing holy water at Wat Ratchasittharam, which was believed to be effective in combating the disease when mixed with the appropriate herbs. The king also consulted the Venerable Suk in curbing the epidemic. The Venerable Suk recommended sprinkling holy water around the city and at the same time chanting from certain Buddhist scriptures. After this was performed, heavy rains followed and the epidemic subsided.

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[16] These *Phra Arahang* amulets were later replicated by famous monks such as Somdet Phra Phuttachan To of Wat Rakhan and are today one of the most expensive and popular in the market of amulets, fetching as much as one hundred thousand Baht. More information on the cost of the *Phra Arahang* amulets can be found in the Thai-Amulets.Com website: http://www.thai-amulets.com/somdej_ arahang3.htm [2011, 20 February].

Venerable Suk's spiritual charisma was also due to his staunch observance of three ascetic practices required of his forest lineage. This involved wearing the same piece of robes since his ordination, eating only from the alms bowl he owned and eating only from one hand. It was believed that since the fall of Ayutthaya, there were not many monks who followed these ascetic practices, and those who did, were usually on their way or had already achieved 'stream entry'. A tradition holds that one day, King Rama I invited Venerable Suk and other royal monks to the palace for breakfast. Unlike the other monks, Venerable Suk insisted only on consuming food and drink placed in his bowl. The king was so impressed; he decreed that henceforth, all monks invited to the palace had to carry with them their own monastic bowl for receiving food.

The perceived spiritual charisma of Venerable Suk thus made him a great 'field of merit' in the eyes of the Thai society during the early Bangkok era. When he was appointed Supreme Patriarch during the reign of King Rama II in 1819, there was to be a ceremony, requiring a formal procession, transporting the new Supreme Patriarch from his original abode to his new residence, Wat Mahathat, the temple of the Supreme Patriarch. Although the plan was to transport the Venerable Suk by a royal boat from the pier to Wat Mahathat, the river was filled with boats by devotees wanting to catch a glimpse of him. The Venerable Suk thus walked on each boat, crossing the river to Wat Mahathat while at the same time offering blessings. Devotees who did not have a chance to attend this event came later to scoop water from the boats that he had crossed to wash their faces. This was due to the belief that the vast store of merits possessed by the Venerable Suk could be transmitted to the ordinary man via anything he touched.

Evidence of Venerable Suk's spiritual attainment was seen upon his passing in 1822. His body was said to be free from decomposition and smelt of flowers. After cremation, his bone fragments were also transformed to relics, which were much sought after by royalty, the monastic community, and laymen alike.

Venerable Suk's authority in temporal affairs is another aspect emphasized in his biography. For instance, although rulers are traditionally supreme in the temporal realm, they are depicted as deferring to Venerable Suk's interests and wishes.

When King Rama I invited Venerable Suk to reside in Bangkok for the purpose of assuming official responsibilities, his intention was for Venerable Suk to reside in Wat Saket. However, Venerable Suk disliked Wat Saket due to its noisy surroundings, as it was located near the city walls. He insisted on residing in Wat Ratchasittharam, which was quieter and further away from the city. King Rama I deferred to Venerable Suk's preference. During King Rama II's reign, the second Supreme Patriarch passed away in 1816. The King initially requested for Venerable Suk to assume this position. However, the Venerable Suk refused on grounds that he was a monk from the forest order and did not like the additional responsibilities. He elected his disciple, Venerable Mi who was younger by seventeen monastic years (*phansa*) to undertake this position. Again, the ruler acceded to Venerable Suk's decision.[17] When the Venerable Suk reluctantly agreed to accept the position of Supreme Patriarch after the death of the Supreme Patriarch Mi in 1819, he did so on

[17] However, due to Venerable Suk's seniority and the fact that he was the teacher of Supreme Patriarch Mi, Venerable Suk was given additional privileges such as the right to sit in front of Supreme Patriarch Mi during official ceremonies and he was also conferred an additional title of Somdet in 1796. Supreme Patriarch Mi was also conferred this additional title. It is noted that this title had not been awarded to the monastic community before and it set the precedent for future Supreme Patriarchs to be addressed with additional Somdet before their title.

the condition that he could continue to reside at Wat Ratchasittharam and not Wat Mahathat, which was the seat of the Supreme Patriarch. King Rama II again agreed to his request, and although there was an official ceremony transporting the Venerable Suk to Wat Mahathat, he returned to Wat Ratchasittharam after the ceremony.

Venerable Suk's charisma in secular affairs is seen in the official appointments, titles and items awarded to him. The books mention that he accepted these with much reluctance as he was a forest monk and preferred a life of meditation and solitude instead of administrative duties and politics. Nonetheless, he accepted them in recognition of his predestined role as the disseminator of the *Matchima* meditation system. Before his appointment as Supreme Patriarch in 1819, King Rama I appointed him as the head of meditation instruction in 1782 and conferred on him the title of Phra Yanasangwon. Although this title signified the deputy to the Phra Phuttachan, the head of the forest order, Venerable Suk's actual responsibility was equivalent to Phra Phuttachan since he was in charge of the practices of all monks belonging to the forest order. The actual Phra Phuttachan at that time was busy traveling under official duties. Thus, temple tradition asserts that Venerable Suk held a similar role to that of the Phra Phonarats of Wat Pakaew who were in charge of the forest monks and their meditation practice during the Ayutthaya period.

The esteem earned by Venerable Suk due to his contributions to the early Bangkok era was recognized in the arrangements made for his funeral. His ashes were placed in a large golden urn that is only reserved for Kings and some members of the royal family. He is the only Supreme Patriarch to have been granted use of this large golden urn in the history of the Bangkok era.

Teacher of renowned individuals

A main theme evident in Venerable Suk's biography is his position as the teacher of renowned personalities, well known even in Thai society today. This was inevitable since Wat Ratchasittharam was, according to temple accounts, the main center of meditation instruction in the kingdom. Anyone who wanted to learn what was believed to be authentic Buddhist meditation would naturally study at this temple. The Venerable Suk having attained a high status in the Buddhist path is portrayed as a dedicated teacher who would instruct his students either physically in the temple or psychically via the mind to ensure they continued to progress spiritually and attain 'stream entry'.

Members of the royal family who sought meditation instruction, studied with the Venerable Suk. He had instructed Kings, Rama I, II, III and IV in the years, 1793, 1788, 1808 and 1817, respectively, in at least the first three stages of the *Matchima* meditation system. This occurred when they were first ordained in their early twenties. Prince Jessadabodindra (King Rama III) is depicted as having a closer relationship with the Venerable Suk. He had spent one rains retreat at Wat Ratchasittharam, in contrast to his father and younger brother who chose to reside at Wat Samorai (Wat Ratchathiwat) instead. Prince Jessadabodindra completed the first three stages within one rains retreat at the temple. He was presented with a *Luk sakot*, (an item used for mind training in the foundational stage) and a *Phra arahang* amulet by the Venerable Suk in recognition of his capability. Even after he left the monkhood, Prince Jessadabodindra continued to practice meditation with the Venerable Suk and he was the only king to achieve the fourth stage of the *Matchima* system (the *ānāpāna-sati stage*) in his lifetime.

As a teacher to the monastic community, the Venerable Suk was the meditation instructor to capable monks who eventually assumed high official positions in the *sangha*. For instance, the second, third, fifth, sixth and seventh Supreme Patriarchs of the Bangkok era were once his students. A fact often emphasized was that even the famous forest monk, Somdet Phra Phuthachan To Phromarangsi (1788–1872) of Wat Rakhang was one of his disciples. This is shown in images of Somdet To placed alongside the image of the Venerable Suk in one of the meditation rooms in *Khana* 5. See Fig.14.

Figure 14: Image of Somdet Phra Phuttachan of Wat Rakhang

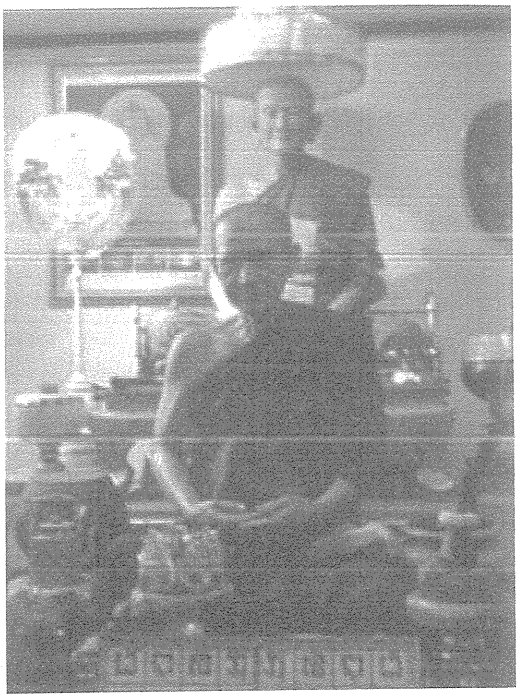

Image of Somdet Phra Phuttachan To of Wat Rakhang placed in front of an image of Venerable Suk

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

Somdet To who has gained more popularity than his teacher in Thai society today is famous for subduing the famous female ghost, *Nang Nak*, his *Jinapañjarakāthā* chant, and for his production of amulets.

Philosophy and technical aspects of the *Matchima* meditation system

Development of samādhi (concentration) and vipassanā (insight)

Information about *Matchima* meditation is acquired from literature produced by the temple.[18] Other details not available from the temple books were obtained from Luang Pho Wira, whom I have regularly consulted about the technical aspects of the system.

Although the meditation system is intricate and complex, it is taught in a structured format, comprising of several levels known as rooms or *hong* (ห้อง) aimed at systematically building the practitioner's concentration abilities (*samādhi*) before the advancement to insight (*vipassanā*).

There are thirteen levels for *samatha* meditation, which are divided into three stages, namely the foundational stage (first three rooms), cultivation of the form absorptions and the cultivation of the formless absorptions. The system thus requires the complete development of eight *jhānas*. As for the development of insight or *vipassanā*, there are nine levels.[19] The meditation system stresses the need to gradually train and develop the mind in a step-by-step approach. Taking a short cut would be counterproductive as the mind might not be stable enough to tackle the higher levels, if not adequately developed. See Fig. 15.

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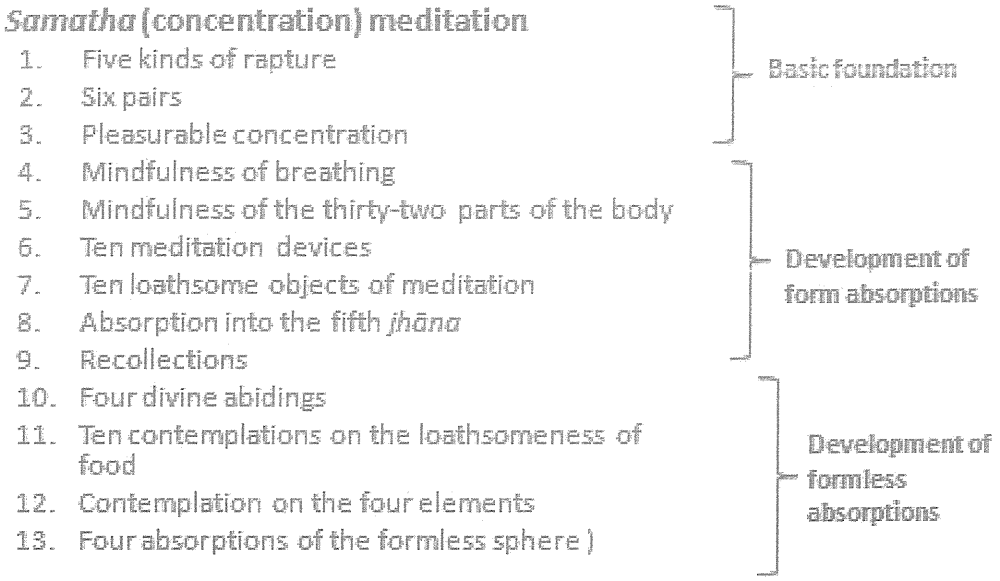
[18] See references in Thai about temple publications in greater detail.

[19] The division of this meditation system into two distinct paths of *samatha* and *vipassanā* is perhaps the reason that practitioners refer to it as 'the Middle Way (*Matchima*) of Samatha- vipassanā Meditation' (สมถะ วิปัสสนากรรมฐาน มัชฌิมา).

Figure 15: *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* levels


Samatha (concentration) meditation
1. Five kinds of rapture
2. Six pairs
3. Pleasurable concentration
4. Mindfulness of breathing
5. Mindfulness of the thirty-two parts of the body
6. Ten meditation devices
7. Ten loathsome objects of meditation
8. Absorption into the fifth *jhāna*
9. Recollections
10. Four divine abidings
11. Ten contemplations on the loathsomeness of food
12. Contemplation on the four elements
13. Four absorptions of the formless sphere)
Basic foundation
Development of form absorptions
Development of formless absorptions

Vipassanā (insight) meditation

1. The seven stages of moral purification
2. The three characteristics
3. Reflection on the three characteristics
4. The three conditions of deliverance
5. Reflections on the three conditions of deliverance
6. Ten aspects of insight absorption
7. Thirty-seven qualities contributing to enlightenment
8. The ten bonds/fetters
9. The opening of the lotus of the Brahmavihara-The path, the fruit and *Nibbāna*

At each level or room, different techniques are taught to the meditation student. To advance to the next room, the student must experience the correct *nimit*. The instructor would then determine based on what he has himself experienced and information transmitted from his own predecessors whether it is the correct *nimit* or experience, which would qualify the practitioner for the next stage. This evaluation process is referred to as "testing the vision or experience '*sob nimit/arom*' (สอบ นิมิต/อารมณ์).

Information about the type of exercises is only revealed for the first four rooms. This is due to the esoteric nature of this meditation system.[20] The

[20] These exercises are described in the temple publications and also via interviews conducted with Luang Pho Wira. I note that after the stage on the mindfulness of breathing, there is little information in the temple publications about the technicalities of the other levels, which are considered more advanced stages.

characteristics of the *nimits* on the other hand, are not described in detail, with only a passing reference made to them as general bright lights and a brief mention of them as consisting of three stages, which is similar to other Buddhist teachings concerning meditation such as the guidance provided in the Visuddhimagga.[21] In the only English publication from the temple, which is a thin chanting booklet, the introduction section explains that the 'inner signs' or the *nimits* are not explained and practitioners should consult an experienced meditation teacher about the authenticity of their visions.[22]

Temple publications describing the first three rooms namely: five kinds of rapture (*hong piti*), six pairs (*hong yugala*) and pleasurable concentration (*hong suksamathi*), reveal diagrams displaying pictures of a lay-person progressing through each room with what appears to be instructions of training the mind to focus on different points of the body from the chest level to the navel. Each point is given a specific name and attribute. The temple books provide instructions on moving the mind according to certain patterns and directions with the purpose of training it and to intensify one's level of concentration. Each of the first three rooms requires the practitioner to perform a different set of exercise. See Fig.16 on exercises employed in the first three rooms.

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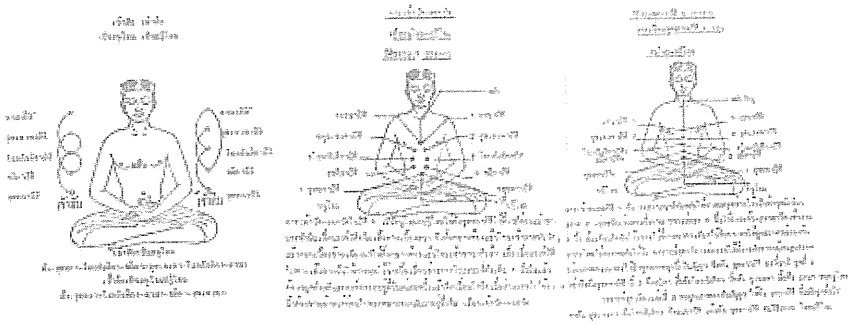
[21] The three stages of *nimits* one would experience comprise of the 'preparatory sign' (*parikamma nimitta*) the 'acquired sign' (*uggaha nimitta*) and the 'counterpart sign' (*paṭibhāga nimitta*) where the practitioner enters into access concentration, just before meditative absorption into the *jhāna*. See Gethin 1998: pp. 182-183 for more information.

[22] Suchitra Ronruen, Bruce Evans, Phaisan Nangnoi. *How to practice clam and insight meditation (samatha-vipassana kammahana) by Somdech Phra Sangharaj Nanasamvara (Suk Kaitheun)*. Bangkok, Wat Rajasiddharam: Sahathammik Ptd Ltd, not dated.

Figure 16: Exercises employed in the first three rooms

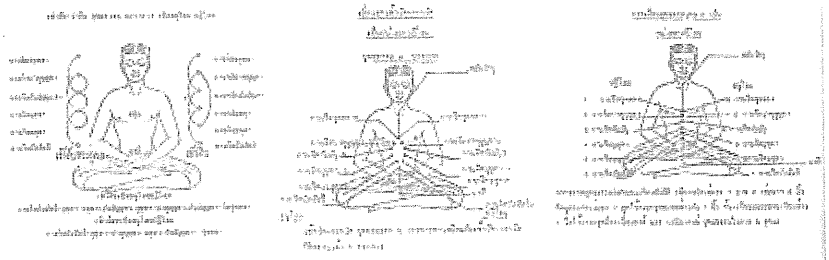
The Five Kinds of Raptures



The diagrams (taken from temple publications) depict the movement of the mind which 'jumps' as seen in the semi-circular loops in the left most picture. This marks the commencement of the stage of the Five Raptures. The mind jumps to five different points possessing distinct characteristics of colours and images. These five are named after five cosmic Buddhas: Kukkusantho, Konagamana, Kassapa, Gotama and Metteyya.
The second and third pictures show how the practitioner can control the movement of these mind 'jumps' via a systematic method of maneuvering them along specific directions on the torso (circular and up/down). These practices are named 'Entering/Leaving the Temple' and 'The Method of Controlling the Five Raptures'.
The third exercise is performed with the help of a meditation device.

Picture taken from temple publication 2010

The Six Pairs



In the second stage, known as the Six Pairs or *yugala*, the practitioner experiences six new characteristics in which the mind 'jumps' as seen in the first picture on the extreme left.
This is similar to the earlier stage of the Five Raptures where the practitioner should train the mind in a circular fashion, seen in the middle picture, known as 'Entering/Leaving the Temple' and fixing the mind in specific six points, seen in the third picture on the extreme right, known as 'The Method of Controlling the Six Pairs'.
The third exercise is performed with the assistance of a meditation device.

Picture taken from temple publication 2010

The Pleasurable Concentration

In the third stage, the mind moves in a circular movement like a number eight, as shown in the left diagram (it first moves from the right- as perceived by the practitioner, up to the center of the chest and back down to the navel, like the number eight). A lay practitioner I spoke to said that this cannot be controlled and that the mind just moves this way once it has attained this level. The diagram on the right shows the method of controlling the movement via setting three points along the torso with the help of a meditation device.

Picture taken from temple publication 2010

The first three rooms, which is the foundational stage, is aimed at developing the mind so that it becomes concentrated, stable and focused, known as *tang samathi* or *phuk samathi* in Thai (ตั้งสมาธิ/ผูกสมาธิ).[23] If successful, the practitioner would attain access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), which is a state just before entering *jhāna* absorption. This is represented by the acquisition of a vision/sign known as the counterpart *nimit (paṭibhāga nimitta).*

Each of the first three rooms culminates in a final exercise involving the use of a meditation device. This consists of an alms bowl, supported by a structure below while a wooden T-shape object is placed flat along the mouth of the bowl.

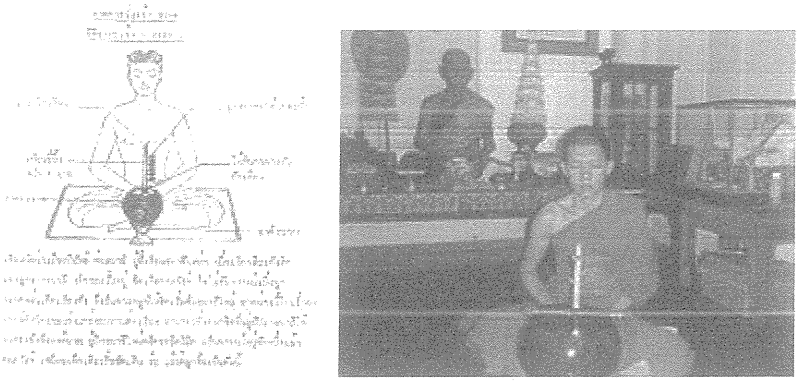
[23] As we have seen earlier, temple discourse states that the early Bangkok kings were all trained in the foundational stages. The practice of meditation was considered an appropriate part of the education for royalty who were ordained as it instilled self-control and concentration and thus considered efficacious to ones personal and political life. Refer to Reynolds 1972: p. 75-76.

A candle is balanced on the T-shape structure and studded with lead weights known as *luk sa-kot*[24] at 2-inch intervals, attached to the candle by matchsticks. When the practitioner commences meditation, the candle is lighted and the lead weights fall periodically with a loud cracking sound. I was informed by some laypeople who have gone through this practice that it is aimed at training the practitioner's mind to withstand loud noises so that he or she continues to remain deep in concentration despite external stimuli. According to the temple publication, the sound is also meant as an auditory signal for the practitioner to move his mind to a new position as specified by the particular exercise. It is noted that the use of the *luk sa-kot* for meditation practices has not been observed in contemporary meditation practices in Thailand.[25] See Fig. 17 on the use of the meditation device.

[24] ลูกสะกด - According to Newell, it was probable that these were previously made from the seeds or pips of fruit in the past instead of lead. Newell 2008: p. 200.

[25] Newell 2008: p. 201.

Figure 17: Use of the meditation device



A meditation device is used in the third exercise for each of the first three levels. Based on my understanding from the temple publications and interviews with the laity, it is used for two purposes- to train the mind so that it continues to remain undisturbed in spite of the cracking sound produced when the lead weight drops into the metal bowl. It also serves as a auditory signal for the practitioner to move the mind along the located on the torso. There are six weights used for the stage of the Five Raptures (as shown in the left picture), seven used for the Six Pairs and three used for the stage of the Pleasurable Concentration. The picture on the right showing a monk practicing this method was taken in the innermost meditation room of *Khana* 5.

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

When I asked Luang Pho Wira for more details about the technicalities of this stage, with particular reference to how the mind actually moves around as shown by the diagrams, he refused to provide a direct answer telling me to practice diligently so that I could progress to that stage and experience it for myself. Nonetheless, I interviewed other lay practitioners about their experiences. Some informed me that after practicing the first exercise diligently, one is able to notice different colours and visions that will seemingly 'jump' around the torso in different locations. This haphazard movement would thus have to be managed by the above-mentioned exercises. I note that the first exercise or instruction for beginners in the first room is to focus one's attention two-finger breadths below the navel *(more information on this under the section on pedagogical methods)*. This was confirmed by Dr Mano who explained that focusing one's attention around the navel activates

one's energy source that results in the above-mentioned experience.[26] The energy that arises is thus brought under control via mindful intention stated in the exercises.

If the practitioner has passed the foundational stage, this would mean that his mind is sufficiently trained to tackle the various meditational themes. The meditational themes used in the *Matchima* system is based on the Visuddhimagga for the purpose of cultivating entry into the form and formless states of *jhāna* absorption.[27]

The fourth stage is the Mindfulness of Breathing Level (*hong ānāpana-sati*), which instructs the practitioner to focus on his in and out breaths with the aid of numerical counting and to be aware of several points of contact or checkpoints inside the body. These checkpoints consist of nine specific spots starting from the tip of the nose to the navel. I was informed that at this stage, the practitioner is supposed to move his mind, represented by the counterpart *nimit* (acquired from the foundational stage) along these nine points. This training is done with the aim

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[26] From my understanding, this is reminiscent of awakening the *Kundalini*, a concept found in indic yoga traditions. It refers to the activation of one's storehouse of energy, which lies dormant in the root chakra (located at the base of the spine). The activation results in the rise of this energy to the top of the head, rising of one's consciousness. This is followed by intense feelings of pleasure, involuntary jerks and visions of colour. The descriptions of the awaking of the *Kundalini* as described in wikepedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kundalini [2011, 25 February], is similar to descriptions of the five *pitis* or joys described in the Suk Kaithuean manuscript, literature about the *Matchima* system and experiences of practitioners who I interviewed.

[27] It is interesting to note that the meditational themes employed for the absorption into the form and formless states of *jhāna* absorption are dependent on whether the theme when contemplated upon results in the rise of the counterpart sign- the mental image of the object of contemplation. Levels four to seven prior to entry into the first *jhana* involve devices or themes that produce the counterpart sign, while nine to twelve have themes that produce signs consisting of the individual essences or special qualities of the meditation subject. Information about the properties of the meditational themes is obtained from Shankman 2008: p. 63-64.

of making the mind sufficiently refined before one attempts to enter *jhāna* absorption.[28] See Fig. 18 on the Mindfulness of Breathing Level.

Figure 18: Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpāna-sati*) level

* At the fourth stage, mindfulness of breathing is performed once the practitioner has successfully completed the first three foundational stages.

* The mind is now fit to enter jhanic absorption via the application of mindfulness of breathing.

* The diagram shows nine points that are located along the breathing passage from the tip of the nose down to the navel.

* Awareness of these points is aimed at helping the practitioner to mindfuly follow the breath as it moves in and out of the body while contacting these specific areas.

Picture taken from temple publication 2010

Entry into *jhāna* absorption is only achieved with the completion of the seventh stage, the ten loathsome objects for meditation (*asubhas*). This is due to the fact that contemplation on the repulsiveness of the body facilitates a strong degree

[28] The practice of *ānāpāna-sati* in some meditation systems is used as a sole path in both the practice of concentration and insight. In the *Matchima* system, it is used as one of the themes for developing the practitioner's state of access concentration. What is unusual about this practice here is the use of the nine points or bases. Most meditation systems employing *ānāpāna-sati* would use a maximum of three checkpoints (abdomen, chest and nose-tip). See Thitavanno 1999: p.91.

of *vitakka* or initiated thought (วิตก), making entry into the first level of *jhāna* absorption easier.[29] Thus, while *ānāpāna-sati* is used in the earlier stages for cultivating access concentration, it is not used for *jhāna* entry, as the meditation theme- the breath, becomes increasingly more refined, making it difficult to detect for contemplation and for initiated thought to arise. I note that this teaching is also mentioned in the Visuddhimagga.[30]

In the aspect of *vipassanā* or insight meditation, a unique feature is the use of the *Brahmavihāra* or the 'Divine Abidings' not merely as a tool for cultivating concentration but for the purpose of insight. This is placed at the final stage. Stages one to eight for the development of insight can be referenced from the Visuddhimagga. This final ninth stage is also referred to in some accounts as the liberation of the mind based on loving-kindness or in Thai, '*Metta Cheto Wimutti*' (เมตตาเจโตวิมุตติ).[31] Through reading of the temple publications as well as consultations with Luang Pho Wira, this is performed when the practitioner is in a level of *jhāna* absorption that enables one to dispense loving-kindness while at the same time contemplating the three characteristics of existence; impermance, suffering and non-self. This is performed only in the first three *jhāna* attainments in the form absorptions. It is not possible for one to perform this in the fourth *jhāna* state and beyond, as the mind would have reached a level of equanimity and balance making it impossible to dispense any type of feeling.

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[29] Entry into the first *jhāna* absorption is characterized by five factors, namely: - *Vitakka* (initiated thought), *Vicāra* (Sustained thought), *Pīti* (estacy), *Sukha* (bliss) and *Ekaggatā* (Equanimity).

[30] Thitavanno 1999: p.108.

[31] In Pali it is known as *Mettā Ceto Vimutti*

One interesting aspect of *Matchima* meditation is the use of incantations, or in Thai, *khathas*[32], in the higher levels to facilitate advancement in the system. One particular *khatha* is the '*Phra Khatha Wani*' (พระคาถาวาณี).[33] This incantation calls upon the teachings of the Buddha, represented by the *tipiṭaka* and the dhamma to reside in one's mind with the aim of eliminating all defilements (*āsavas*). In the verses, a metaphor is used, comparing the *tipiṭaka* as a beautiful angel residing in a lotus- the Buddha's mouth. According to legend, the Venerable Suk discovered this incantation inside an ancient manuscript at Wat Mahathat in the old capital of Sukhothai. He used it prior to meditation and attained a higher level in 'stream entry', becoming an *Anāgāmī*. Due to its effectiveness, he incorporated it into the insight stages of the meditation system. This provides evidence that magical formulas are an important aspect in the soteriological path under the *Matchima* system.

Matchima meditation used for healing

One interesting aspect of the Matchima meditation system is that it possesses a separate modality on healing. According to Luang Pho Wira, the practitioner is qualified to learn the healing techniques of this system once they are proficient in the fourth level of concentration meditation, *ānāpana-sati* or the mindfulness of breathing level.[34] This is because the *ānāpāna-sati* level trains the

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[32] In Pali it is known as *gāthā*

[33] In Pali is is known as *Phra Gāthāvānī*

[34] Although Luang Pho Wira claims to have taught this modality to quite a number of his disciples, I get the impression that it is not a required field of study and only taught on request. This is because one other layperson I interviewed mentioned that he was not taught this system even though he had practiced the mindfulness of breathing level for over two years. This was due to the fact that he did not ask Luang Pho Wira about it.

practitioner to move his mind, represented by the counterpart *nimit* along the breadth channel. This process is known as *khochon chit* (โคจรจิต) and is also an essential requirement for healing.

The temple has produced one book explaining the use of this meditation system for healing,[35] although, like all its publications, it is not meant to be a self-help manual, since it is impossible for anyone interested in trying out the techniques stated in the book to commence without proper guidance. The information is also adapted from Venerable Suk's manuscript, which I have examined in Chapter 4.

Similar to the manuscript, the healing modality teaches that the human body consists of nine bases, referred to as *Nawaharakhun Kaw Thi* (นวหรคุณ ๙ ที่). It is noted that these bases are different from the contact points used for the mindfulness of breathing level. The healing technique is carried out while the individual is in a state of access concentration, due to the need to project the mind, represented by the counterpart *nimit* acquired from the foundational stage to the nine bases. These nine bases have specific characteristics and attributes and by directing one's attention to any of them individually or in a specific combination, will produce positive results for the healing of various physical, emotional and mental conditions afflicting oneself or another.[36] See Fig. 19 showing the nine bases and their attributes.

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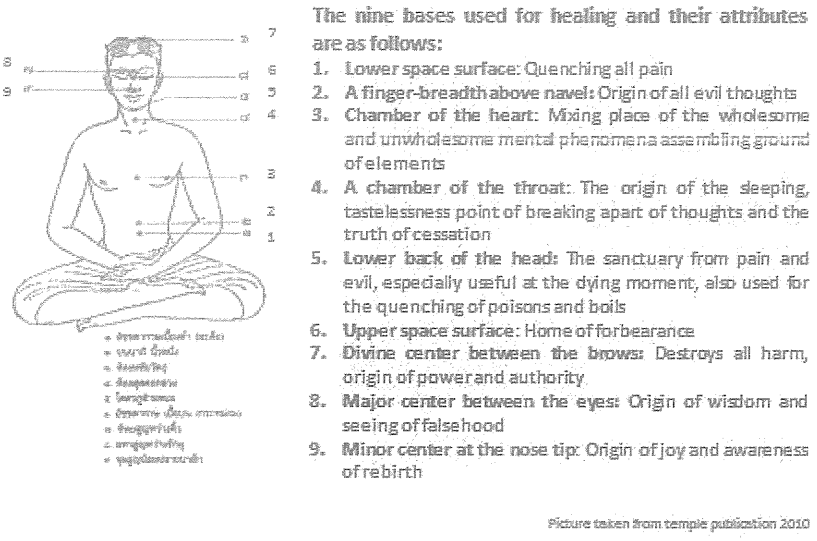
[35] The book is titled *Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases*, in Thai-กรรมฐานแก้กรรมรักษาโรค compiled by Luang Pho Wira. See references in Thai for more details.

[36] To some extent, this is similar to how metaphysical healing via the energy centers or chakras of the body is performed. Like the nine bases, contemporary metaphysical healing, based on Indian yogic philosophy and interpreted by Theosophical teachings, emphasizes the use of seven energy centers of the body, which possess different emotional and physical attributes, and can be

Figure 19: Nine bases and their attributes


The nine bases used for healing and their attributes are as follows:
1. Lower space surface: Quenching all pain
2. A finger-breadth above navel: Origin of all evil thoughts
3. Chamber of the heart: Mixing place of the wholesome and unwholesome mental phenomena assembling ground of elements
4. A chamber of the throat: The origin of the sleeping, tastelessness point of breaking apart of thoughts and the truth of cessation
5. Lower back of the head: The sanctuary from pain and evil, especially useful at the dying moment, also used for the quenching of poisons and boils
6. Upper space surface: Home of forbearance
7. Divine center between the brows: Destroys all harm, origin of power and authority
8. Major center between the eyes: Origin of wisdom and seeing of falsehood
9. Minor center at the nose tip: Origin of joy and awareness of rebirth
Picture taken from temple publication 2010

Illness is related to the stagnancy of 'wind' in the body, which might not circulate properly due to blockages as a result of various emotional and mental distresses arising from one or several of fourteen unwholesome states.[37] The

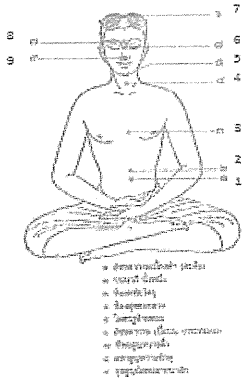
manipulated via a range of different techniques in ensuring optimal physical, mental and emotional health.

[37] There are altogether fourteen emotional and mental unwholesome states that are the causes of physical disease and which impedes the flow of energy or 'wind' in the body and disrupts the sphere of the four elements that constitute the essence of the body. The fourteen defilements consist of: - Delusion, two kinds of anger, shamelessness towards evil, fearlessness towards evil, flurry and worry, greed, false belief, conceit, selfishness, confusion, sloth, torpor and doubt. See

presence of these unwholesome states would also accelerate the deterioration of the elemental spheres located in the center of the body. This would result in the manifestation of disease and other physical ailments.

The temple book states that although addressing these unwholesome states would prevent illnesses from arising, the *Matchima* system teaches that once illness has manifested, one can move the mind along the nine bases, in order to facilitate the movement of 'wind' or *lom* (ลม) to rectify the problem.[38] An example of healing can be shown in Fig. 20.

Figure 20: Example of healing using the nine bases



Example instruction on how healing is performed according to the manuscript:
Diarrhea: Move awareness down along the vertebral column to base one, then move it further down the anal channel and shift the mental concentration back to base one again. After which, proceed to base two. If it does not get better, move the concentration up to base three. If it still does not subside, continue to be mindful in whatever position, with the awareness concentrated at base two and three until it gets better
Constipation: If the condition has lasted nine to ten days, move the concentration down to base two, three and one. Then move it further down the anal channel before taking an expelling exhalation pushing through along the channel with maintained awareness two to three times. Maintain the concentration at the anal area for the duration of time that makes a betel nut chew tasteless. This method can also be used to treat urinary problems by alternatively moving the concentration to the bladder and urethra.

Picture taken from temple publication 2010

Luang Pho Wira's book, *Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases (กรรมฐานแก้กรรมรักษาโรค)*: 2551: Introduction.

[38] I find it fascinating that these techniques of healing are related to the philosophy of Indian Ayurevedic medicine, which purportedly reached Thailand around the same time as Buddhism in the second or third century BC. This ancient medical practice shares similar concepts on how unwholesome mental and emotional states can produce adverse impacts on the physical body, and that the manipulation of energy along invisible lines can assist to rectify these problems, as seen in the ten *sen* (เส้น) used in Thai massage. For more information, see Brust 2004: pg. p 4-7.

When asked how this aspect of healing fits into the Buddhist scriptures, Luang Pho Wira claims that there is no conflict, as even though what is taught is not found in the Pali canon, it is nonetheless a tradition that is passed down from a lineage of teachers going all the way back to the historical Buddha. These methods of healing were transmitted within the lineage of Phra Phonarats who were the heads of meditation instruction of the forest order residing at Wat Pakaew during the time of Ayutthaya. These methods were recorded in the manuscripts safeguarded by the Venerable Suk after the destruction of Ayutthaya and was brought to Wat Ratchasittharam. It was taught during the early Bangkok period and according to Luang Pho Wira, was a popular method used for healing discomfort and diseases until 1937, when it was removed from the monastic curriculum.

Luang Pho Wira adds that the techniques taught for healing and avoidance of calamities can be seen as an aspect of *samatha* development as it would contribute towards making one's mind calm and peaceful. As such, a calm and peaceful mind is the foundation for *vipassanā* or insight, necessary for the eradication of defilements. This is in line with the Buddhist soteriological path. In addition, the act of healing oneself and others through this technique should also be seen as an act of providing loving-kindness towards living creatures (including oneself) and that by itself is an act of tremendous merit, accelerating one's spiritual development in the process.

Luang Pho Wira claims to use the healing techniques often for self-rectification of minor physical discomfort. He adds that if the ailment is severe, it would be more prudent to seek conventional medical attention. With regards to the healing of others, he emphasizes that it is more important to learn the technique for oneself, which is more effective. However, if there is a need to heal others, he warns that there is a danger that the healer may absorb the disease of the person he is

treating. As such, he uses a special wooden instrument, which he describes as similar to a wooden cane to absorb the negative energies before it reaches his own physical body. The ability to heal others is however not emphasized by the temple, as he fears that it would attract crowds to seek miracle cures and inconvenience the daily activities of the monks

Besides Luang Pho Wira, I have also had the opportunity to interview a young novice monk, about twenty-two years of age who is currently in the mindfulness of breathing level and was taught the healing techniques by Luang Pho Wira. When interviewed, he claims to have used the healing techniques for bodily aches and pains, fevers, flu and stomach ache. He has not tried healing other people as he feels that he does not possess enough merits to do it effectively.

Pedagogical methods: Initiation ceremony, experiences of practitioners and observations

This segment records my own observations and impressions being instructed in the *Matchima* meditation system at *Khana* 5. I will also include information gleaned from casual conversations conducted with other practitioners about their own experiences while learning the meditation. My intention is to provide a glimpse into the pedagogical methods used by *Khana* 5 in teaching the *Matchima* meditation system.

Initiation is the first step in the *Mactchima* meditation system. I learnt about this requirement on my first trip to *Khana* 5. I spoke to a few laypeople practicing meditation in the meditation chamber and asked them what was so distinctive about this system. They all replied that it was the initiation ceremony

that was unique and could not be found elsewhere. On the same day, I met the meditation instructor, Luang Pho Wira and expressed interest in learning and researching the *Matchima* meditation system. He seemed excited on learning that I was a foreigner and interested in writing about the *Matchima* meditation for my Master's thesis. He commented that there have been some foreigners in the past who have inquired about the system for research, but have declined to be initiated as practitioners as they have other religious convictions. He added that I am the first to examine the system from a practitioner's point of view and expressed that he was pleased.

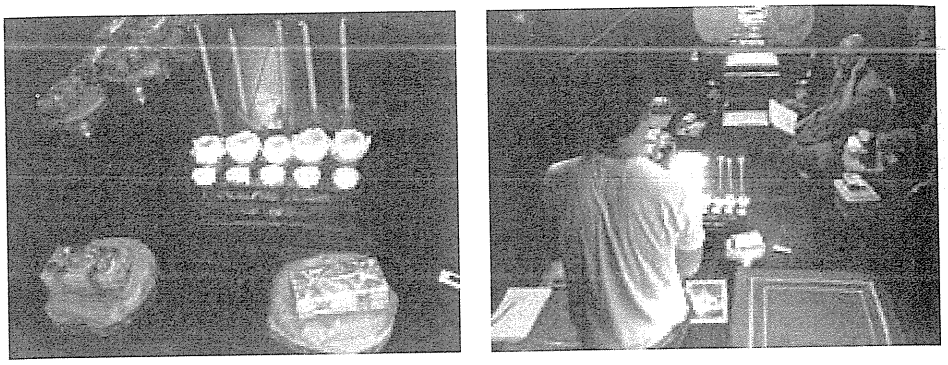
The initiation procedure is an ancient practice and according to Luang Pho Wira, it was performed since the time Buddhism arrived in Thailand. The ceremony represents a formal acknowledgement of one as a practitioner of Matchima meditation. In Thai, it is referred to as the *Khuean Khammathan* (ขึ้นกรรมฐาน) ceremony. The procedure involves the new initiate paying respect to five entities, three of which comprise of the triple gem- the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *saṅgha*. The additional two are the teacher and the meditation system, known as the *Phra Kammathan* (พระกรรมฐาน).

My initiation took place on a weekday morning. A Thai friend who assisted with initial translation work accompanied me.[39] To document the ceremony, I had brought my camera along. Luang Pho Wira noticed it and enthusiastically offered to pose for pictures to facilitate the documentation. Both of us were initiated into the meditation system at the same time. Together with Luang Pho Wira, there were only three people involved in the ceremony. The ceremony is performed with a tray

[39] Special thanks to Jay Kornnatt Surapat for his assistance.

containing lotus flowers, yellow candlesticks, popped rice (ข้าวตอก) in little cups and incense sticks arranged in rows of five.[40] See Fig. 21 on the initiation ceremony.

Figure 21: The initiation ceremony



The initiation tray consists of the lotus flowers, yellow candle sticks, popped rice (ข้าวตอก) in little cups and incense sticks arranged in rows of five. The ceremony is conducted in front of a Buddha image and the meditation teacher, with the tray placed in-between.

Pictures taken by Patrick Org

[40] In Thai, it is referred to as the *Thad Khan Ha* (ถาดขันห้า).

The prospective student kneels in front of a Buddha image and the meditation teacher with the ceremonial tray placed in-between. According to Luang Pho Wira, the ceremony was traditionally performed on Thursdays, as it was the day dedicated to teachers in Thai tradition. This was adhered to in the past where each day of the week was accorded different significance. Nowadays, the ceremony could be performed on any day. In the past, the prospective pupil would have to prepare the ceremonial tray himself. However, in today's context, Luang Pho Wira mentions that it is easier for the temple to make the preparations and the pupil would usually offer a monetary donation for the effort

To assist the prospective pupil in reciting the required chants for the ceremony, a book specially prepared by the temple, titled 'Handbook for the observance of Buddhist chants for morning/evening and chants for meditation practice'[41] is provided. The meditation teacher instructs the initiate to turn to the relevant pages and repeat the verses. At the same time, the candles and the incense sticks are lighted and offered to the five entities mentioned earlier. The chants are performed in Pali and then in Thai. They include taking refuge in the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha* of the past, present, future and for them to expedite one's meditation progress. The verses also implore one to seek forgiveness from any past transgressions one may have committed against the triple gem. This was then followed by the teacher chanting Pali verses and accepting the request of the prospective disciple to learn the meditation system.

The impression I had of the initiation ceremony was that it seemed to be a pre-packaged 'theme-park' experience that was tailored for visitors who had no prior knowledge or need to prepare for it. This was not only reflected in the tray

[41] วีระ ฐานวีโร, พระครูสังฆรักษ์. *คู่มือทำวัตรเช้า-เย็น และ บททำวัตรพระกรรมฐานมัชฌิมาแบบลำดับ*. กรุงเทพมหานคร:สำนักพิมพ์สัมปชัญญะ, 2551.

and the verses, which were prepared beforehand for the initiate, but also the fact that there was no special requirement to even chant the Pali verses properly. I remembered stumbling over several verses that were Thai transliterations of Pali with no requirement to repeat them again. It would not be far fetched to believe that the initiation ceremony in the past was a more solemn affair, perhaps requiring the initiate to prepare the tray himself and memorize the verses prior to the actual event.

The initiation ceremony lasted for around half an hour. This was followed by the first meditation session. I was informed that for my first attempt, the session would last for no more than fifteen minutes. Before beginning to meditate, more verses had to be chanted. The pre-meditation chants could be done out loud, especially if one was to meditate in a group, or silently, if done individually. The chants could be found in the same meditation handbook. The chants briefly seek forgiveness from the Buddhas for one's bad *kamma* committed in the past and setting one's intention for a fruitful meditation session. The chants also invoke assistance from the triple gem coupled with the spiritual assistance from the meditation masters of the past to provide spiritual assistance for the practitioner to experience the *nimit* he or she is supposed to receive in the appropriate level. Similarly, one is to recite the post-meditation chant after. This deals with offering the merits gained from meditation to all sentient beings.

The initial phase of meditation begins with focusing one's complete attention two finger-breadths below the navel. I was told to do this in combination with reciting the mantra '*buddho*'[42]. I was instructed not to follow the breath, as

[42] This is a popular mantra for concentration or *samatha* training in Thailand since ancient times. It can be considered a form of *anussati* or one of the recollections of the Buddha, which is mentioned in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification). Another popular Thai mantra is *samma araham*, meaning the 'enlightened one', which is used in *Dhammakāya* meditation.

taught by other meditation schools as this would take the attention away from the area of focus. Following the breath, I was informed, is an elementary form of meditation more suitable for children.

According to Luang Pho Wira, and the meditation books published by the temple,[43] complete focus in this area, generates energy necessary for progressing to more advanced practices.[44] The generation of energy in this region is possible as the nucleus of the physical body congregates around the navel in the form of the four basic elements of earth, wind, fire and water. In the terminology of the *Machima* system, this area is also known as the location of the 'Buddha's Virtues' (พระพุทธคุณ). One practitioner compares this exercise to charging a battery, imbuing it with energy, while another compared it to pushing a button stimulating an electrical charge.

In my subsequent visits for meditation practice, Luang Pho Wira would guide me in the pre and post meditation chants. For the first few weeks after the initiation ceremony, the duration for practice was extended from fifteen minutes to half an hour and sometimes, a maximum of three hours. I was advised to change my

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[43] This claim is mentioned in the book:- *The Fundamentals of Practicing Samatha-Vipassanā Meditation According to the Sangkharat Suk Kaithuean* (หลักปฏิบัติสมถะ-วิปัสสนากรรมฐาน ของสมเด็จพระสังฆราช สุก ไก่เถื่อน) written by Luang Pho Wira 2006: p. 59.

[44] This philosophy is similar to Chinese and Japanese 'Qi' or energy work exercises. This philosophy claims two finger-breadths below the navel is the location of the body's center of gravity and the seat of one's internal energy, known as *Dan Tien* or *Hara* in Mandarin and Japanese. This region also roughly corresponds to the Indian concept of the *manipura*, or navel chakra. In yoga philosophy, it is thought to be the seat of *prana* (energy in Sanskrit) that radiates outwards to the entire body. Refer to T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Meditation by Da Liu 1998: pp. 91-92. Some teachings dealing with the use of energy healing claims that this region, known as the *hara* is the energetic, psychic and mechanical center of the body. Directing attention and one's consciousness to this region, two finger-breadths below the navel creates calmness, energy, an expansion of consciousness and inner peace. See Hosak and Lubeck 2009: p. 634.

position from the usual seated cross-legged position to a walking position, while continuing to maintain my attention two finger-breadths below the navel. This was to mitigate the dull ache that developed in my legs after sitting in the same position continuously. I was however advised not to perform this in bed, before sleep, as the release of energy from this practice would keep one awake

In each session after the meditation practice, I would be asked if I experienced any *nimits*. This is essential; individuals who had finished their meditation session would consult Luang Pho Wira privately and relate their experiences to him.[45] He would in turn give them advice on how to progress further. This element of secrecy was evident after my first meditation attempt. My friend and myself were called separately by Luang Pho Wira to a corner of the room and whisper our experiences to him.

I was informed that in the past, before reporting the experiences to the meditation instructor, one had to ensure that he/she was dressed smartly. The practitioner also had to bring along flowers and candles. After prostrating to the Buddha image and the meditation instructor, he was to offer the flower to the instructor, and then proceed to inform him about his experience. From my observations, I note that this is not performed today.

Luang Pho Wira also advised me to practice at home and to consult with him about any nimits or experiences that I might have via handphone. I have observed that he carries a personal hand phone with him at all times. Other practitioners I spoke to claimed that he can be contactable even late into the night.[46]

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[45] According to Luang Pho Wira, experiencing these *nimits* in one's mind eye was similar to being in a dream, except that the vision is more lucid.

[46] I have noticed that his handphone ringing tone is set to a cock's crow, in line with Venerable Suk Kaithuean's affinity with cockerels.

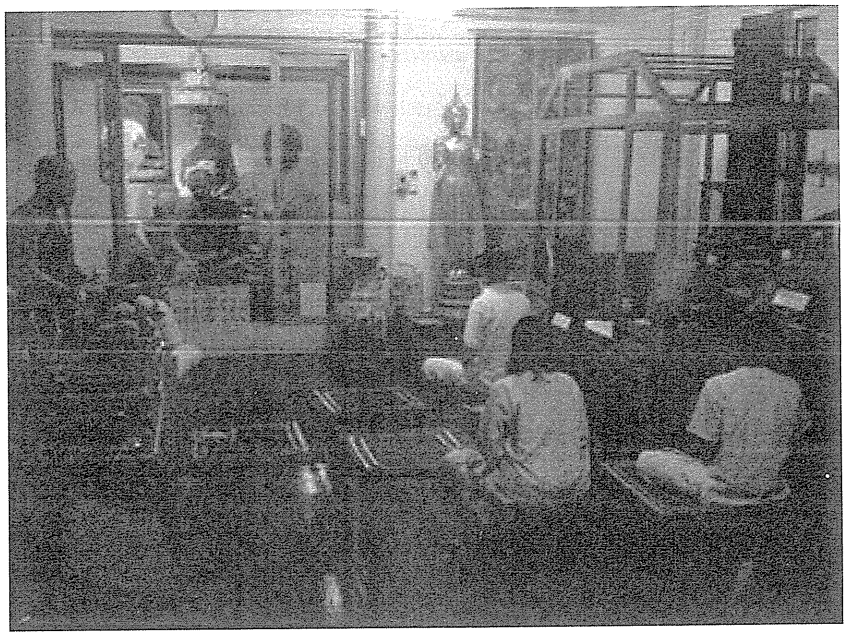
While conversing with other practitioners, I noted that they were extremely secretive about revealing their experiences. Some even nudged the other if he or she was revealing too much during the interview. The practitioners were taught that a critical aspect of this meditation system is its esoteric element. Revealing too much information about the type of *nimits* they encountered was problematic in two ways. Firstly, if the listener was at a more elementary stage in his practice, he might conjure up *nimits* instead, thus hindering his spiritual development. Secondly, revealing too much was a reflection of ego (an aspect of a defilement or *kleśā*). This was a sure way of eliminating the same experience again and regressing in one's progress. Nonetheless, some information I was able to gather from my casual interviews was that the *nimits* encountered in each level of the *Matchima* are extremely detailed, in terms of features and colour. I was told that all practitioners will encounter similar visions or experiences when they reached the same stage.

I have also observed that in contrast to other meditation centers and temples in Thailand, which have scheduled group meditation sessions, this aspect is absent in *Khana* 5. I was informed that people arrive to meditate in larger numbers during the last weekend of the month or during important festive occasions.[47] Even then, these groups do not number more than thirty people. I noted this in one of my field trips to the temple during *Makha Bucha* day in 2011 (18th February). There were fifteen lay devotees, usually groups of family, dressed in white undertaking the eight precepts and they stayed in the temple for three nights. Luang Pho Wira would lead them in the pre and post meditation chants, instruct them to meditate together as a group and follow the group in circumambulating around the ordination hall in the evening as is the custom for *Makha Bucha*. Refer to Fig. 22

[47] Such as *Visakha Bucha* day or Mother's day.

showing a group of practitioners during the *Makha Bucha* day at Wat Ratchasittharam.

Figure 22: Practitioners as a Group during *Makha Bucha* Day



Practitioners meditating as a group during the Makha Bucha day

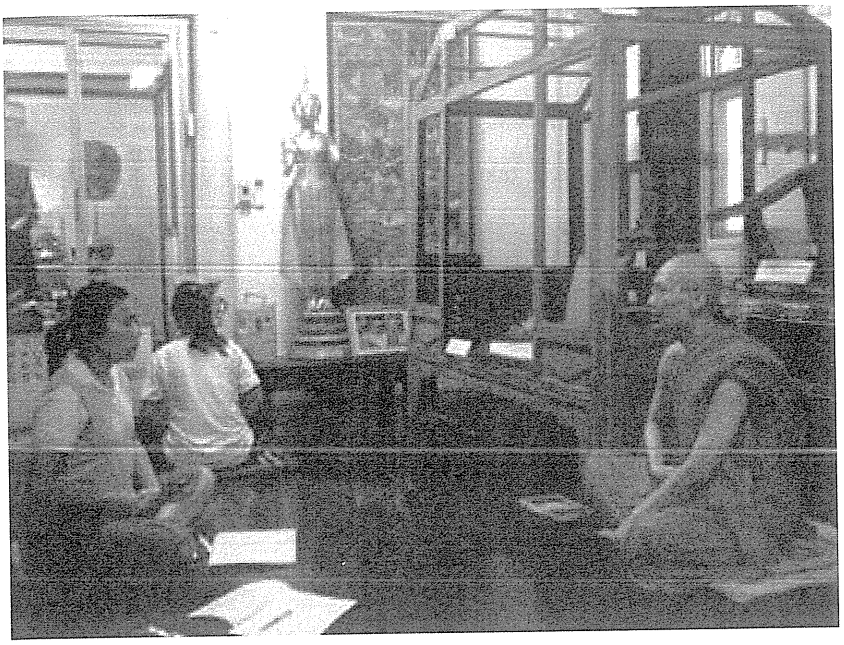
Picture : Patrick Ong 2010

Luang Pho Wira also mentioned that a large number of his disciples practice at home rather than at the temple. This is especially so if they are residing in other provinces. Those who do come to the temple on a normal weekday would perform the meditation individually. They would sit in the main meditation area or in the inner meditation area, take the chanting book from a shelf nearby and conduct the procedure by themselves. Luang Pho Wira would usually lead new initiates in the pre and post meditation chants. He would also enter the mediation rooms from time to time to check and provide assistance when necessary.

I note from my field observations that practitioners who use the meditation rooms at *Khana* 5 are in different levels of advancement in the *Matchima* system. A high level practitioner could thus be seated next to a beginner who is still struggling to experience his or her first *nimit*.

Although Lang Pho Wira is the only meditation instructor at the temple, he has other monk assistants who are appointed to brief about the *Matchima* system when he is busy with other duties. This includes sharing the history and origins of the meditation system, providing a background overview of Wat Ratchasittharam together with brief details about the Venerable Suk's biography, and providing initial guidance in meditation practice. See Fig. 23 showing a monk assistant instructing a new lay practitioner.

Figure 23: Assistant monk instructing new lay practitioner



A new practitioner briefed by a resident monk Phra Phonsak. He is assistant to the chief instructor Luang Pho Wira

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

Practitioners

The Meditation Instructor- Luang Pho Wira[48]

Luang Pho Wira (Born 1949) is the chief meditation instructor of the temple. He is appointed as the assistant to the abbot and is currently the head of *Khana* 5. He assumed this position ten years ago after the death of the previous

[48] Luang Pho Wira Thanwiro (วีระ ฐานวีโร) is also known as Phra Khru Sitthisangwon (พระครูสิทธิสังวร).

head. Interviews with practitioners at *Khana* 5 reveal that Luang Pho Wira is currently the most qualified person to teach, as he is believed to have passed all the levels in the *Matchima* system. This took him a total of about twenty years to accomplish.

Conversations with other residents in the temple, not from *Khana* 5 however indicate that there are other meditation instructors, still alive and who once taught the system in the past, but have now ceased to do it. I discovered this during my interview with *Maechi* Chinda (the guardian of Venerable Suk's shrine) who claimed to be a former instructor of the system and had even traveled overseas to Singapore for a few months to teach at a Thai temple. She has since stopped teaching due to old age.[49]

Luang Pho Wira has been rather hesitant to provide me with a detailed account of his own background before he became a monk and how he encountered *Matchima* meditation, often changing the subject when I inquired about this a few times. It seems that he prefers to direct attention mainly towards the meditation system. He did mention briefly that when he was a layman, he was already aware about the existence of the temple and was a regular visitor, having been born and raised around the vicinity. Although he was exposed to various meditation schools in the past, he chose *Matchima* meditation as he found it effective in producing results.

I was able to gather more information from a chatty layman, who mentioned that Luang Pho Wira's meditation teacher was his own biological father.

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[49] Newell mentioned in her thesis that there was an attempt made by the former abbot of the temple, Luang Pho Sam to propagate the *Matchima* meditation system in Singapore around 1996. Newell 2008: p. 195. It would be interesting to examine the influence of this meditation system outside Thailand as a future research topic.

His father had been the former meditation instructor at *Khana* 5 who ordained as a monk subsequently after marriage and the birth of his two children. He personally coached Luang Pho Wira on the intricacies of the system when Luang Pho Wira was a young layman.

Luang Pho Wira, is extremely passionate in propagating *Matchima* meditation. Although not on a grand scale like other meditation schools such as Wat Dhammakāya, which possesses its own TV channel, Luang Pho Wira has taken some steps to disseminate knowledge of the system to the general public

This first started with the construction of a small museum in 1997. The museum is situated just before the entrance of the meditation hall for visitors to examine the various personal belongings of the Venerable Suk such as his walking stick, his alms bowl, honorary fan, and the manuscripts he inherited.[50] There are also other items dealing with the significance and importance of the temple as a center of meditation in the past. These items are all kept neatly in a glass case with explanations in Thai. Besides the Venerable Suk's belongings, there are other artifacts on display showcasing manuals relating to traditional Thai healing methods with pictures showing the various energy lines in the human body resembling diagrams used for Thai massage or related healing treatments. From my impression, the display of these items at the temple museum is an attempt to show the relationship between the *Matchima* meditation system and its healing component with a much broader tradition of healing practices that were once dominant in the region

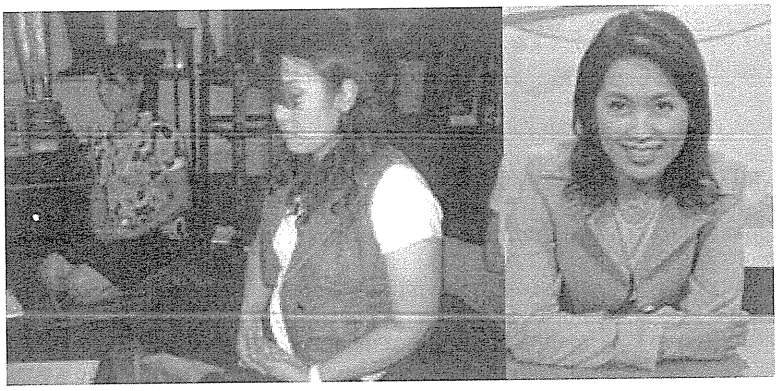
There are several books that have been written by Luang Pho Wira. The main subjects covered by these books include; chants required when performing

[50] I have provided pictures of some of these items under historical perceptions of the meditation system and the Venerable Suk's life.

Matchima meditation, biographies of the Venerable Suk, information about the *Matchima* meditation system, which includes meditation for concentration, insight and healing and about its history and origins. The collection of books is readily available at *Khana* 5. Luang Pho Wira claims that they can also be found around major bookstores in Bangkok under the Buddhism section.

A website: http://www.somdechsuk.com was created with the assistance of a lay disciple. The website contains information on the history of Wat Ratchasittharam, the pictures and biographies of the abbots of the temple, a resume of Luang Pho Wira's credentials, pictures of the museum in *Khana* 5 and brief information on the meditation system. From my analysis of the webpage, I found that it functions as a focal point of contact and communication for the practitioners of *Khana* 5. Important events organized by *Khana* 5 are broadcast in the webpage. In addition, it also serves as a means of promoting and advertising the *Matchima* meditation system. In one occasion, the website featured the picture of a popular female newscaster and actress named Khun Po meditating at *Khana* 5. See Fig. 24.

Figure 24: Newscaster Khun Po meditating at Wat Ratchasittharam



The website founded by Luang Pho Wira contains the the picture of a well known newscaster and actress named Khun Po คุณโป (ปุณฑริก สุดกุลเกษม). This demonstrates active attempts made by Luang Pho Wira to promote the Matchima meditation system to the general public

Pictures on left from temple website and right from wikipedia 2010

I have also observed that Luang Pho Wira takes pride in displaying the names of foreigners who have consulted him about *Matchima* meditation for their research purposes. This is listed in his resume in the website. On the day of my initiation, Luang Pho Wira requested me to write my name in Thai for him. I found my name listed together with the names of two other foreigners in the webpage the following day.

The publication of the books and the website have commenced since 2003 and according to Luang Pho Wira, there has been an increase in the number of visitors to the temple and lay practitioners undertaking the practice. He claimed that due to his promotional efforts, the number of initiates had increased to around

ten thousand people since he became the official meditation instructor ten years ago. Prior to this, the number of practitioners was on the decline.

From his point of view, the decline of *Matchima* meditation was due to the popularity of contemporary schools of meditation, particularly the Burmese *Vipassanā* technique that was introduced into Thailand since the 1950s. This was in contrast to during the time of King Rama III where it was once commonly practiced in Thailand and the main method of practice for the monastic communities. According to Luang Pho Wira's own words, it would be a great pity if this tradition were allowed to become extinct as not only is it worth saving on account of its importance to Thai traditional custom and heritage, it is also the 'correct' practice directly transmitted from the Buddha via a long lineage of teachers

For a spiritual practice to survive, besides promoting awareness of it via the use of books and websites, it is also equally important that the ability to transmit this teaching continues into the future. With this in mind, I asked Luang Pho Wira if he is in the process of grooming a potential successor in the temple. His response was that it was extremely difficult to find one who would fulfill the requirements of having successfully progressed to all the stages in the system and who will keep the integrity of the system intact with no modifications. It seems that most monks and lay people he instructed were not able to climb up and complete the highest *vipassanā* stage because this requires extensive effort and long-term commitment. Many have left to reside in other temples or have moved on to teach a modified system after realizing that they were not capable of progressing to the highest levels within an expected time frame.[51]

[51] One layperson I spoke to confirmed this as he remembered that there was one other monk who had attained a high level in the *Matchima* system and was teaching a modified version at another temple.

Monks, Maechis and Lay People

With the aim of obtaining a comprehensive profile of the people practicing the *Matchima* meditation system, I devised a questionnaire, which I distributed to laypeople, monks and *maechis* meditating at *Khana* 5. The questionnaire took into account the respondent's personal background, how they encountered this meditation system, the nature of their practice, and their perceptions of it.

(Refer to the Appendix C on the Questionnaire used).

Besides distributing the questionnaires, one-on-one interviews were also conducted with selected individuals in order to better understand the reasons why they chose this meditation system over others. These responses were then analyzed to provide insights into the nature of this 'living tradition' passed down by the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuean.

Personal Background

A total of twenty-one questionnaires were returned fully completed.[52] The results are presented in the following pie charts: -

[52] I believe that twenty-one responses represent an adequate sample of the profile of *Matchima* practitioners practicing at the temple. Despite Luang Pho Wira's claims that the number of practitioners had increased tremendously to around ten thousand ever since he was appointed the chief meditation instructor, my observations indicate that the number of practitioners do not number more than thirty during each of my field trips, even during important religious or festive occasions. The twenty-one responses were selected as they were adequately filled out. I note that a number of practitioners did not want to provide complete answers in the questionnaires as they felt that they were revealing too much information that was appropriate.

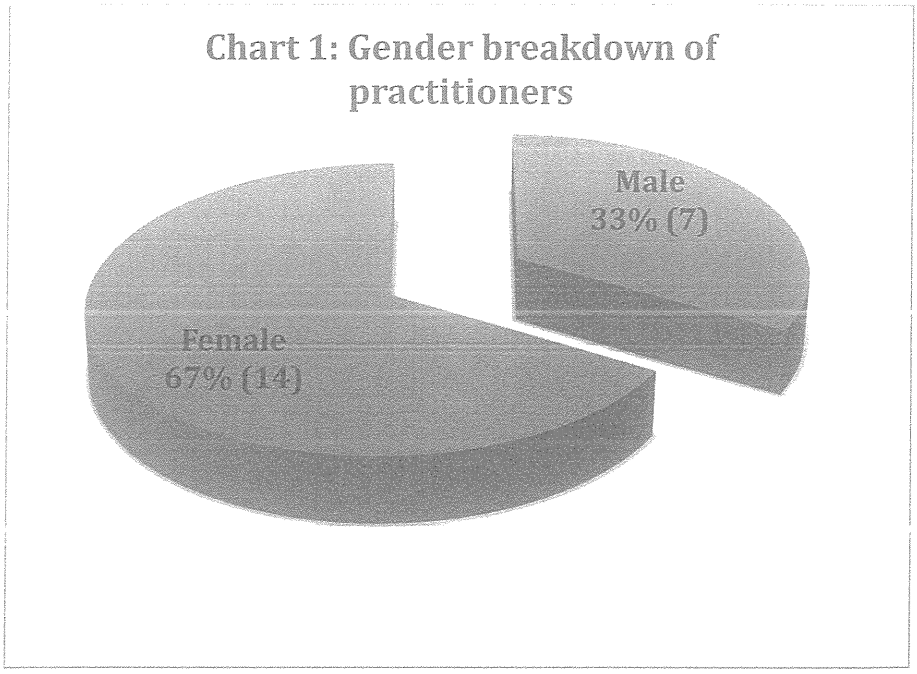


Chart 1: Gender breakdown of practitioners
Male
33% (7)
Female
67% (14)

Chart 2: Occupation of practitioners

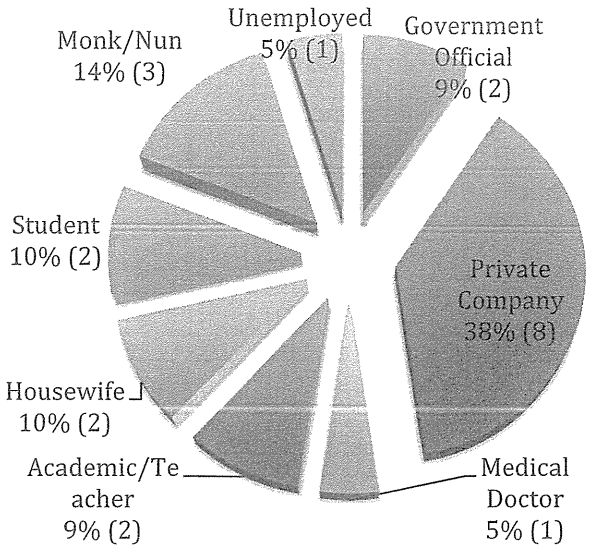
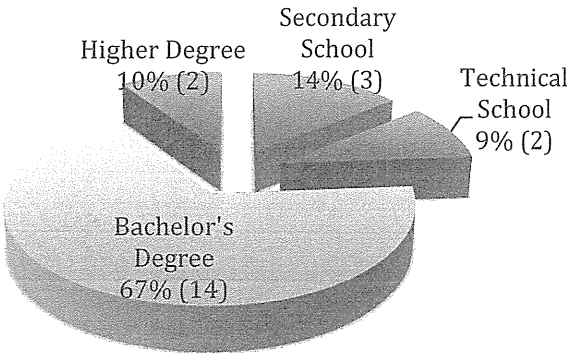


Chart 3: Educational background of practitioners



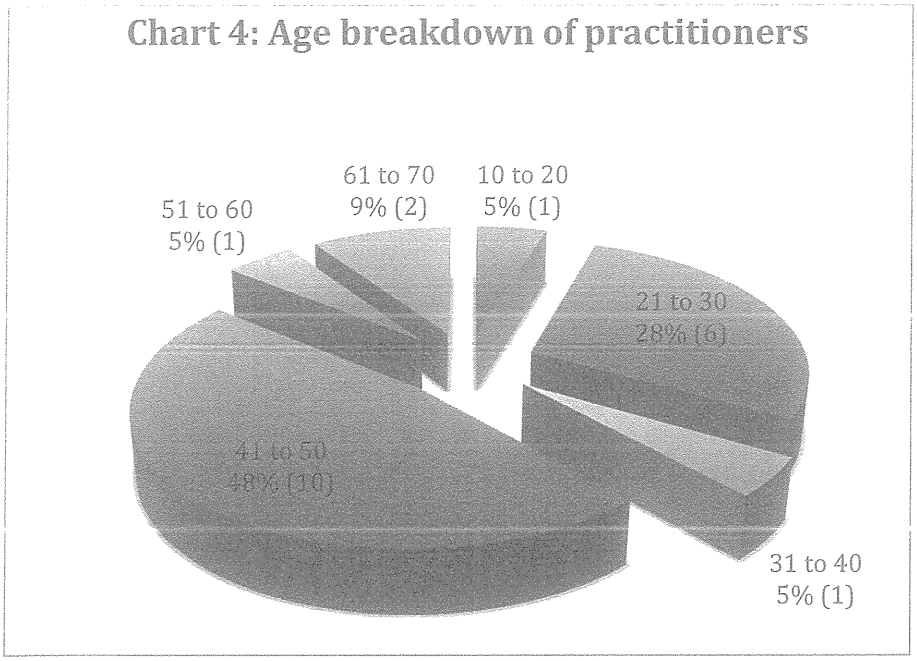


Chart 4: Age breakdown of practitioners
61 to 70
9% (2)
10 to 20
5% (1)
51 to 60
5% (1)
21 to 30
28% (6)
41 to 50
48% (10)
31 to 40
5% (1)

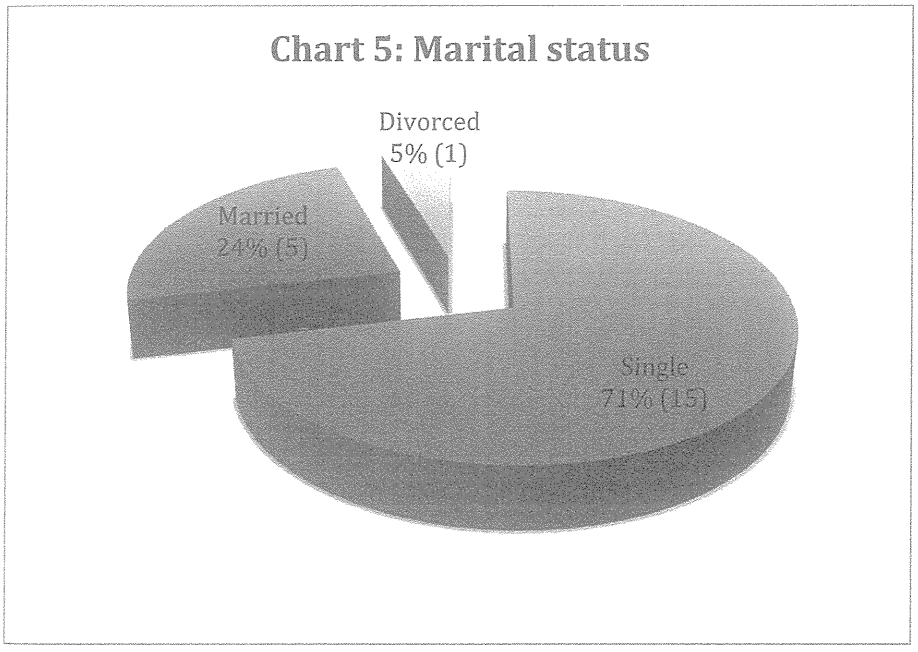


Chart 5: Marital status
Divorced
5% (1)
Married
24% (5)
Single
71% (15)

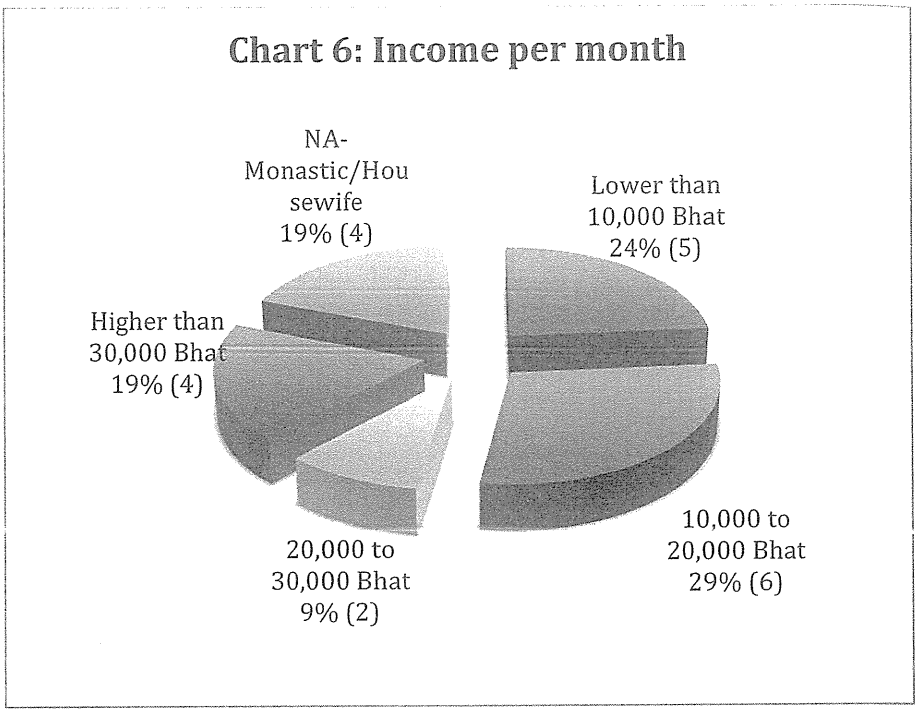


Chart 6: Income per month
NA-Monastic/Housewife 19% (4)
Lower than 10,000 Bhat 24% (5)
Higher than 30,000 Bhat 19% (4)
10,000 to 20,000 Bhat 29% (6)
20,000 to 30,000 Bhat 9% (2)

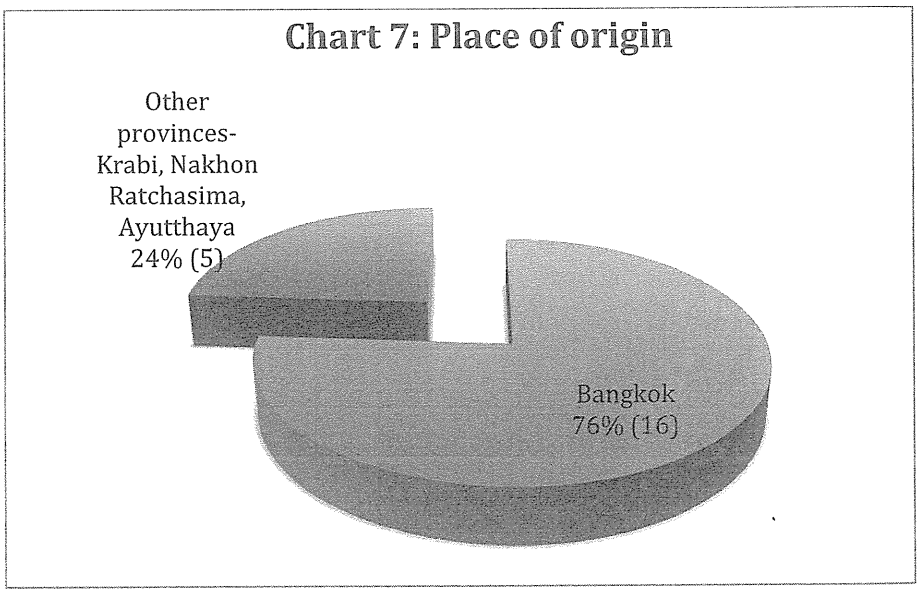


Chart 7: Place of origin
Other provinces-Krabi, Nakhon Ratchasima, Ayutthaya 24% (5)
Bangkok 76% (16)

Observations

More than half of the practitioners are female (67%) from Bangkok (76%), with many having their own private business. They are usually single (71%), and most are middle age, ranging from 40 to 50 years (48%). A majority of them have been educated in the university and have attained at least a bachelor's degree (67%). The amount of income earned varies across the board, according to each individual.

Encountering *Matchima* Meditation and practicing it

The twenty-one respondents who completed the questionnaires were informed that for this segment, they could select more than one choice. As such, some results will be presented only in percentages rather than in values. Open-ended questions were compiled and presented in a table format.

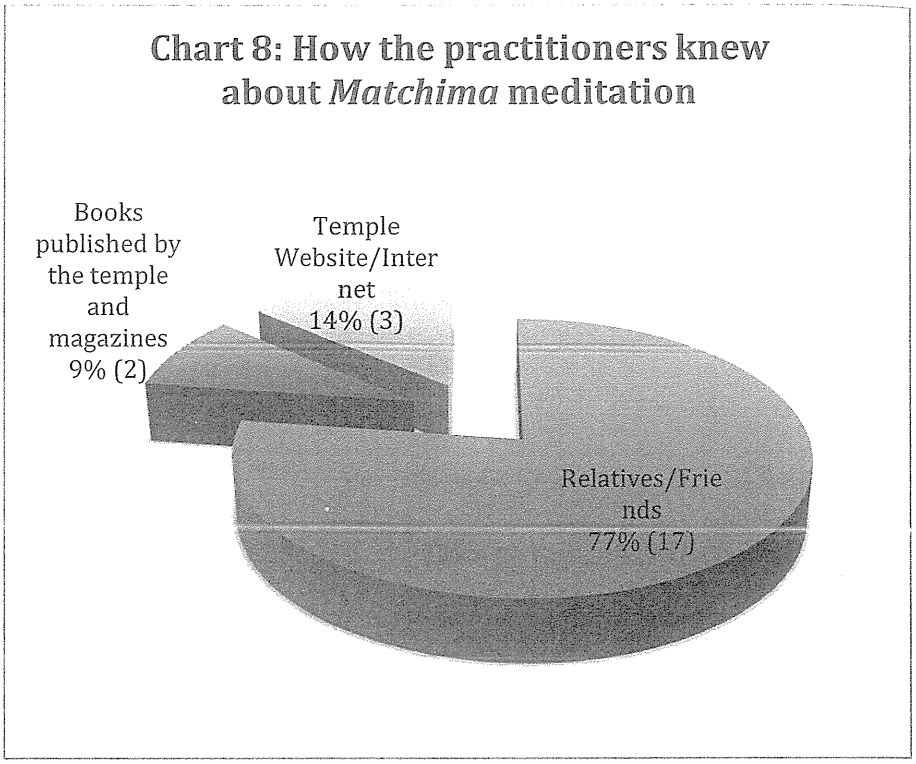


Chart 8: How the practitioners knew about *Matchima* meditation
Books published by the temple and magazines 9% (2)
Temple Website/Internet 14% (3)
Relatives/Friends 77% (17)

Table 5: Have you practiced other meditation methods before?

Have you practiced other meditation methods before?		If yes, what types?	
No	3 (14%)	*Phutto*	68%
Yes	18 (85%)	*Yup Noh Phong Noh*	25%
		Dhammakāya	7%

Chart 9: Duration of practice

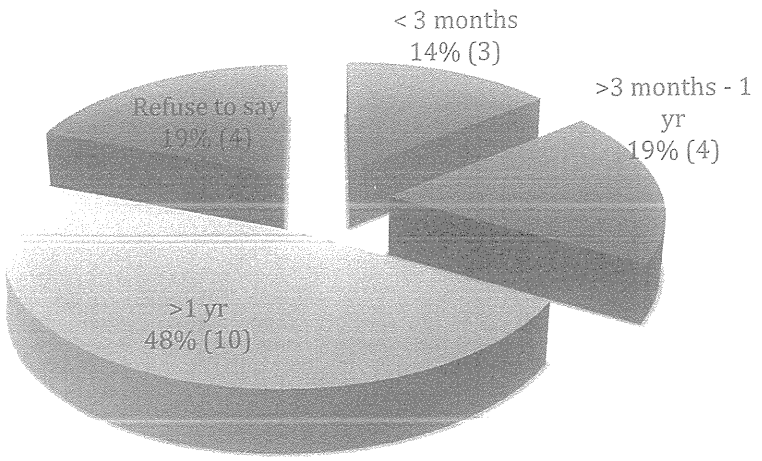
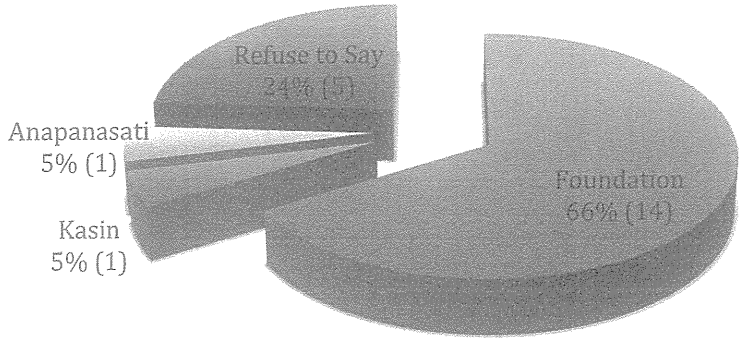


Chart 10: Stage of attainment



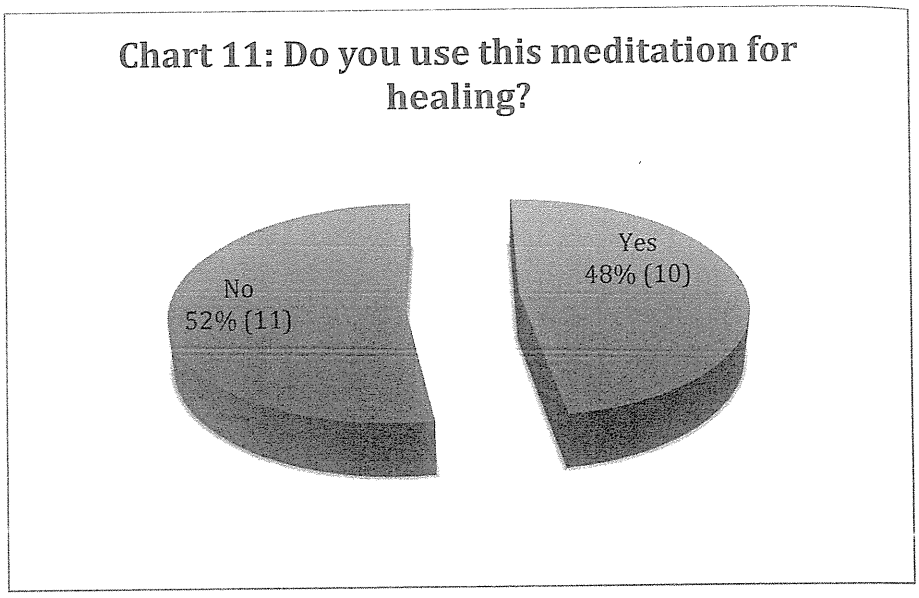
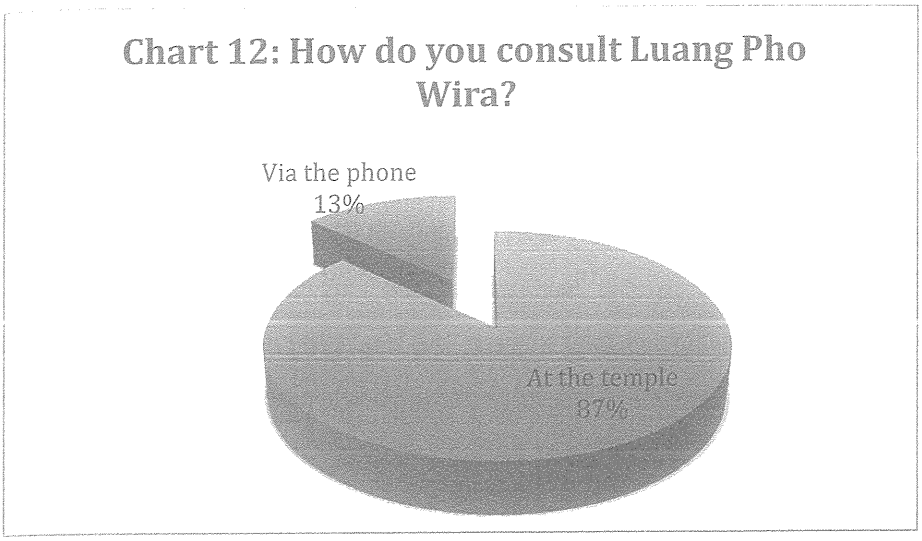
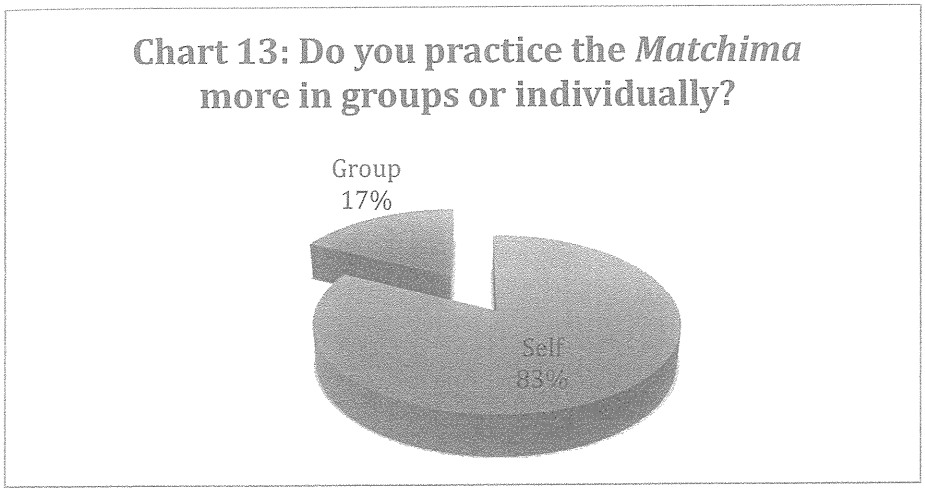


Table 6: How often do you practice and which days at the temple

How often do you practice the meditation?		Which days do you come to practice at the temple?	
Everyday	10 (47%)	Every end of the month	1 (4%)
More than once a week	7 (33%)	Almost everyday	3 (14%)
Once a week	2 (9%)	Weekdays	2 (9%)
When free	1 (4%)	Weekends	4 (19%)
Not often	1 (4%)	During holy days	11 (52%)
	21		21





Observations

The majority of the practitioners encountered *Matchima* meditation through the recommendation of their relatives and friends (77%). Most have been exposed to other forms of meditation schools before (85%). The most popular one

is the breathing in and out or the *Phutto* method (68%) followed by the Burmese *Vipassanā* method (25%) and the *Dhammakāya* (7%) method.[53]

Most of the practitioners in the survey have practiced *Matchima* meditation for a year or more (48%) and are still in the foundational levels of the system (66%). Those who have passed the foundational levels are in the mindfulness of breathing (*hong ānāpana-sati*) level (5%) and the ten meditational devices (*hong kasiṇa*) level (5%). A few practitioners refused to divulge which level they are currently at (24%). This is probably due to the perceived need to keep this information a secret to others.

Close to half of the participants of the survey have used this meditation for healing purposes (48%). Many have said that they used this meditation for the healing of common ailments such as insomnia, back pain, walking problems, toothache, and headaches. One even replied from personal experience that it helped in the healing of cancer. Everyone who had used this system for healing claimed that it was effective for him or her.

Most of the participants are earnest and dedicated practitioners, meditating either everyday or more than once a week (80%). I note that the majority would chose to meditate at home (58%) rather than at the temple due to their work and family commitments. It is also evident that most would usually travel to the temple to practice meditation during holy days according to the Buddhist calendar. Consultations are usually done in person at the temple (87%) rather than via the phone. This is despite the fact that Luang Pho Wira carries his

[53] I was informed that a number of Thai people would have been taught the *phutto* method of meditation practice when they were in school, which is a form of *ānāpana-sati*, being mindful of the breath as it moves in and out of the nostril.

hand phone around with him everywhere he goes. Most practitioners of the *Matchima* system also prefer to meditate individually rather than in groups (83%).

Perceptions of *Matchima* Meditation

Like the previous section, the twenty-one respondents selected more than one choice, which they deemed applicable in their situation. The results are thus presented in percentages instead of values. Responses to open-ended questions were collated and summarized for the purpose of analysis.

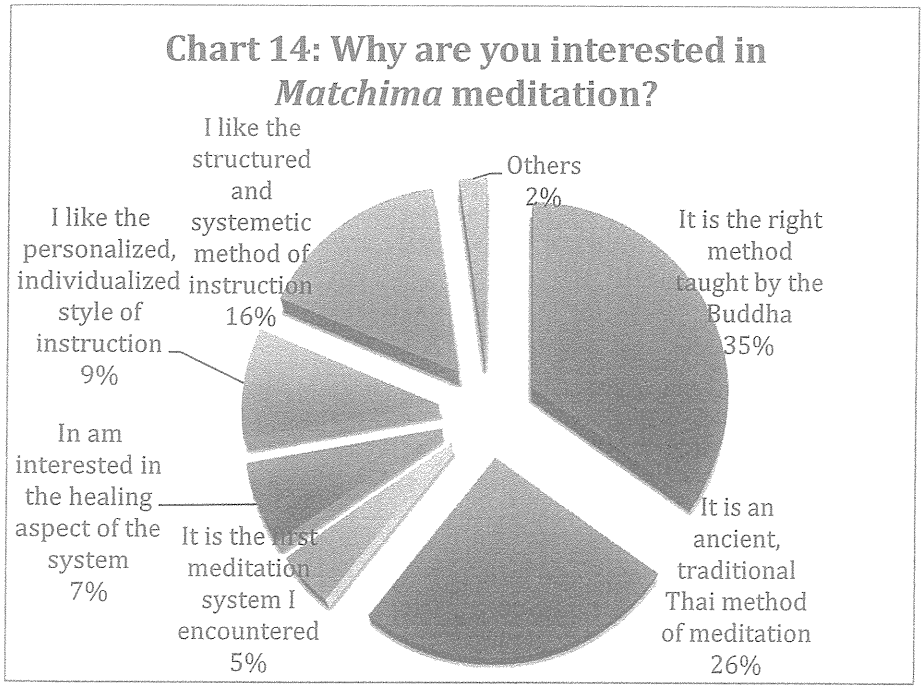


Chart 14: Why are you interested in *Matchima* meditation?
I like the structured and systemetic method of instruction 16%
Others 2%
I like the personalized, individualized style of instruction 9%
It is the right method taught by the Buddha 35%
In am interested in the healing aspect of the system 7%
It is the first meditation system I encountered 5%
It is an ancient, traditional Thai method of meditation 26%

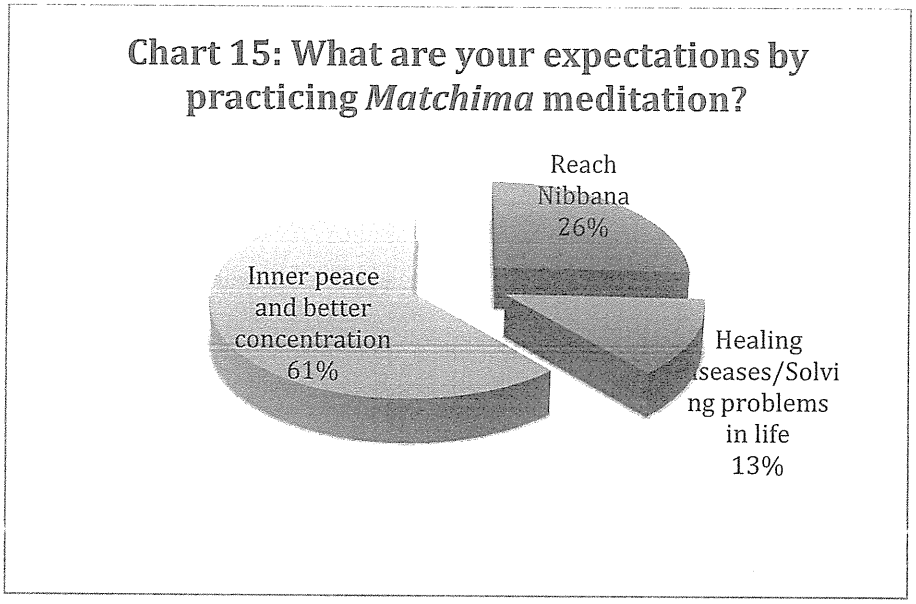


Chart 15: What are your expectations by practicing *Matchima* meditation?
Reach Nibbana 26%
Inner peace and better concentration 61%
Healing seases/Solvi ng problems in life 13%

Observations

Examining the reasons for the practitioner's devotion to *Matchima* meditation and expectations from their practice would provide an understanding into how this meditation is perceived by them.

It is observed that the majority of practitioners were attracted to *Matchima* meditation as they felt that it is the right Buddhist meditation practice taught by the Buddha (35%). They also liked the idea that it is also a spiritual system practiced in Thailand since ancient times (26%). The third most popular reason was that they found the structured and systematic method of instruction appealing (16%). This was again verified from an open ended question posed earlier in the questionnaire, which asked practitioners who had experienced other meditation styles before, why they changed to the *Matchima* system.

Claims that it was the right Buddhist practice, ancient in origin, comprehensive and structured comprised 84% of the replies.

The majority of practitioners state that their main expectation for continuing the practice is the attainment of inner peace and better concentration (61%). Although achieving *nibbāna* is often portrayed as the goal of Buddhist practice, it is ranked second (26%). These results were verified by an opened ended question asking what benefits they derived from this practice. Eighty-four percent of the responses claimed that they benefited from better concentration and were more mindful of their actions at work and in their social life.

One-on-one Interviews: Discourse used to Justify Commitment and Dedication to Practice

From personal interviews conducted with the teacher, *maechis*, monks, novices and laymen, I felt intrigued by the discourse used by them in justifying their dedication and commitment to this practice.

One discourse commonly mentioned is that other meditation systems that are popular in Thailand today are modified or simplified versions of the complete meditation tradition that was kept intact by Venerable Suk. These contemporary meditation systems are depicted as trimming certain aspects of the system, which they considered unimportant. For instance, practitioners would often highlight the importance of the initiation ritual, which is unheard of in other modern meditation traditions where signing up for a course or joining a meditation group is all that is required to learn it. Luang Pho Wira mentions that other contemporary meditation

systems do not possess this critical ceremony as the founders of these systems either do not see it as important or are unaware of its significance.

Practitioners like to mention that even famous meditation masters such as Luang Pho Sot, the founder of *Dhammakāya* meditation and Luang Phu Man, the founder of the modern forest monk tradition have learned the *Matchima* meditation system at Wat Ratchasittharam and have adapted this system and started their own lineages. This was inevitable, since Wat Ratchasittharam was a famous center for learning meditation in the Bangkok era and anyone serious about learning meditation would seek instruction at this temple.

According to Luang Pho Wira and other monks I spoke to, Luang Pho Sot had only mastered the first three foundational levels of the *Matchima* system. He did not complete his training at the temple and used what he was taught to propagate a new method, known as *Dhammakāya* meditation from the temple, Wat Paknam where he was appointed abbot.

According to practitioners, this is why *Dhammakāya* meditation only emphasizes directing ones attention around the navel, similar to the early stages of the *Matchima* system even for its highest levels, while in the *Matchima* meditation system, the practitioner progresses to other positions or bases in the body above the navel as he/she progresses to the higher levels. It is interesting to note the responses I received from the questionnaire when I inquired whether the practitioners have learnt the *Matchima* meditation elsewhere besides Wat Ratchasittharam. While most indicated that they had not, a few wrote that they had experienced it when they were taught meditation at Wat Paknam- the original center of *Dhammakāya* meditation. The similarities between the two meditation systems, not only from a rational and factual point of view, but also from the practitioner's perspective cannot be denied.

In a conversation with *Maechi* Chinda, the guardian of Venerable Suk's shrine, she revealed that she was a high level practitioner of the *Matchima* system and had once instructed the meditation system in her younger days. Before her exposure to the *Matchima* system, she was practicing *Dhammakāya* meditation and had also attained a high level in this other meditation system. She claimed that the main difference between the two systems was that for the *Matchima* system, one could move the crystal sphere (the body's nucleus) around the body to heal diseases, while in *Dhammakāya* meditation, the crystal sphere remained at the same position.

Another meditation system that is viewed in a similar manner is the Burmese *Vipassanā* system or the '*Yup-Noh-Phong-Noh*' method. According to one monk I spoke with who was residing at *Khana* 5, the Burmese founders of this method had trimmed out the foundational and *samatha* stages of the *Matchima* system that was once widespread in the country as they felt that jumping straight into insight was easier and less time consuming.[54]

A shared sense of history with Theravāda Buddhist meditation practices that once dominated the region of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka was another discourse I noted from my interviews. Most practitioners would repeat the same story told in temple publications about the history of the meditation system, its arrival into the region and popularity during the Ayutthaya and early Bangkok era. In one interview session I conducted with Luang Pho Wira, I asked him about the historical background of this meditation system. Luang Pho Wira excitedly went

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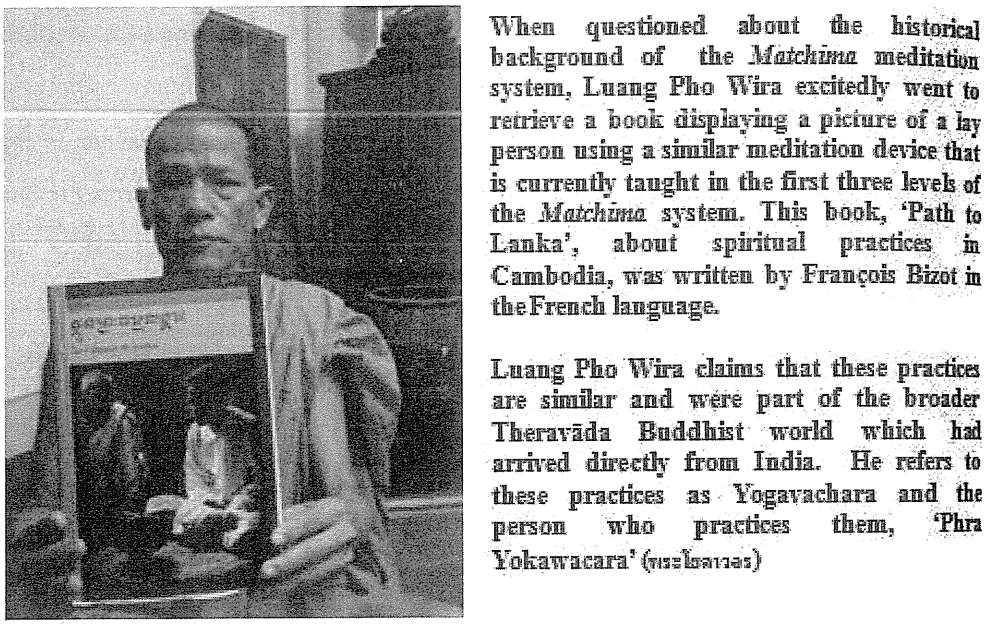
[54] It is noted that the Burmese *Vipassanā* method, is often called the 'bare-insight' method as it jumps straight into the contemplation of all existential phenomena without the need to cultivate high levels of concentration.

to fetch a book by François Bizot proudly displaying the cover picture of a French book entitled the Path to Lanka. See Fig. 25.

Figure 25: Luang Pho Wira with Bizot's Book



When questioned about the historical background of the *Matchima* meditation system, Luang Pho Wira excitedly went to retrieve a book displaying a picture of a lay person using a similar meditation device that is currently taught in the first three levels of the *Matchima* system. This book, 'Path to Lanka', about spiritual practices in Cambodia, was written by François Bizot in the French language.

Luang Pho Wira claims that these practices are similar and were part of the broader Theravāda Buddhist world which had arrived directly from India. He refers to these practices as Yogavachara and the person who practices them, 'Phra Yokawacara' (พระโยคาวจร)

Picture: Patrick Ong 2010

The picture in the book shows a layperson using the same meditational device used for the first three levels in the *Matchima* meditation system. Luang Pho Wira claims that these practices are similar and were part of the broader Theravāda Buddhist world, which had arrived directly from India. He refers to these practices as *Yokhawacara* (Pali: *Yogāvacara*) and the person who practices them, *Phra Yokhawacara* (พระโยคาวจร). Dissemination of the complete *Matchima* system had unfortunately faded into obscurity over time in many Theravāda countries, and to his knowledge, only Wat Ratchasittharam in Thailand teaches the complete system intact.

6

Comparing the 'Living Tradition' with the Ancient Manuscript

Introduction

Having examined the main features of the manuscript bequeathed to Venerable Suk (Chapter 4) and the 'living tradition' (Chapter 5) currently taught at Wat Ratchasittharam, this chapter seeks to determine how the teachings and practices have evolved. To achieve this, differences and similarities between the pre-modern (manuscript) and the modern ('living tradition') will be examined. In addition, insights gleaned from conversations with the instructor; Luang Pho Wira will also be included.

Differences

Receiving the meditation subject from the instructor

The first part of the manuscript follows the instructions laid down by the Visuddhimagga, which states that practitioners should select one of the forty meditation subjects for contemplation depending on their innate personalities and temperaments. This is necessary if one expects to achieve success in the cultivation of concentration (*samādhi*). There are a total of six categories of temperament that define one's behavior as listed in the manuscript. In addition, the manuscript states that the instructor, who is also referred to as a 'good friend' (*kalyāṇamitta*), should be familiar with the practitioner's characteristics and choose the appropriate meditation subject for his student.

In contrast, the 'living' *Matchima* meditation system that is taught today does not stress the prerequisite for character evaluation. Receiving a personalized meditation subject from the instructor, as stated in the manuscript is not observed today. All practitioners, after initiation, are instructed to meditate using the same technique, which in the first level or room, requires one to focus on two finger-breaths below the navel while repeating the word '*phutto*'.

Newell mentions that in her one-on-one meditation experience with Luang Pho Wira, he provided her with a personalized meditation object or 'preparatory sign' (*parikamma-nimitta*), which was to visualize an image of her own self, seated in meditation position. She attributes this to receiving the meditation subject from a *kalyāṇamitta*. In addition, she was also given the chance to attempt the *sa-kot* exercise using the meditation device.[1]

I note that this was Newell's first and only meditation experience at Wat Ratchasittharam. Luang Pho Wira himself verified this and also claimed that she did not undergo the initiation ritual. Her experience is not typical of practitioners of the *Matchima* system and from my impression, it was especially tailor-made just for her.

[1] Newell 2008: pp. 206-207.

Systematization of the meditation instruction

While the 'living' *Matchima* tradition prides itself on the systematic manner in which the meditation is instructed, this is not alluded to in the manuscript.

As mentioned earlier, the manuscript merely provides a list of the forty meditation themes and the levels of *jhāna* absorption one can attain through contemplation on the selected theme. It is the instructor who decides which meditation theme to give his student as the subject of contemplation.

The 'living' *Matchima* system however provides a structure or a 'road-map' on the number of levels one has to progress in the system. At each level or room, there is a specific theme for contemplation. It advocates that all the meditation subjects that were mentioned in the manuscript for the cultivation of *samādhi* must eventually be employed and systemizes them into ascending levels. This is done with the purpose of attaining the highest *jhāna* absorption (up to the eighth *jhāna*). It is also mandatory for all practitioners regardless of the differences in their temperament to utilize the same subjects based on which level or room of attainment they are currently at. According to Luang Pho Wira, the systematic levels of the *Matchima* meditation system were taught to him via the lineage of meditation instructors at Wat Ratchasittharam.

In the aspect of *vipassanā*, levels one to six in the *Matchima* system for the development of insight are the same sequence as the first part of the manuscript expounding on *vipassanā* meditation. The remaining last three levels comprising of the 'Thirty-seven Qualities contributing to Enlightenment', 'The 10 Bonds/Fetters (*saññojana*)' and 'The opening of the lotus of the *Brahmavihāra* - The path, the fruit

and *nibbāna'* are not part of the teachings of *vipassanā* in the manuscript.[2] It is most likely they were added later under the 'living tradition' of the *Matchima* system

It is therefore possible to conclude that the systemization of the meditation instruction and the inclusion of additional levels in *vipassanā* was a later evolution; separate from the when the manuscripts were first composed.

Qualification for learning the healing modality

In the manuscript, one is qualified to perform the nine bases meditation for healing and the mitigation of problems only after going through and perfecting both the *samatha* and *vipassanā* levels in the *Matchima* meditation.[3]

According to Mano, this healing modality is a much older school of meditation, which was already established in the region before the arrival of the Pali texts. The conflict between the two philosophical systems reached a state of compromise with the healing modality reserved only for the advanced student of meditation.[4]

In the 'living' *Matchima* system however, the practitioner is permitted to learn the nine bases meditation for healing immediately after the completion of the foundational three stages in the *samatha* level, when he or she is currently trained in the stage of *ānāpana-sati* (the fourth stage). This claim is also mentioned in the

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[2] Although not included in the *vipassanā* teachings in the first part of the manuscript, meditation on the opening of the lotus of the *Brahmavihāra* is however mentioned in the third manuscript dealing with utilizing the nine bases for healing and solving problems.

[3] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p.90.

[4] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p.294.

2008 temple publication that is disseminated to the general public and sold in bookstores.[5]

Omission of the body's nucleus from contemporary temple texts

I did a comparison of the techniques and teachings regarding the nine bases meditation between the pre-modern manuscript and the 2008 temple publication.[6] The comparison revealed obvious omissions of several diagrams showing the nucleus of the body, represented by the elemental spheres. These diagrams are found in the manuscript under the section on the treatment of anxiety and the method of cooling down the body.[7]

Although these two treatments are extracted from the manuscript and included in the temple publication, the diagrams are not.

A probable reason is the need to prevent practitioners from visualizing the image, which they are supposed to experience themselves during meditation training. Another suggestion is that the manuscript was used as a reference for meditation masters who were monks or used by monks who were studying to become instructors, rather than used by amateurs.[8] Thus, the inclusion of the diagrams in the manuscript was fine, as it would be presumed that the readers would have already attained the level where they were already able to perceive the body's nucleus.

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[5] The book is titled *Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases* (กรรมฐานแก้กรรมรักษาโรค) compiled by Luang Pho Wira. See references in Thai for more details.

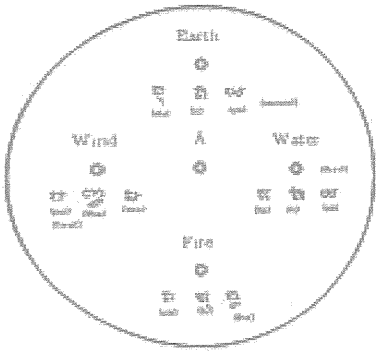
[6] Ibid.

[7] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp.148-151, 164.

[8] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp.290, 314, 317.

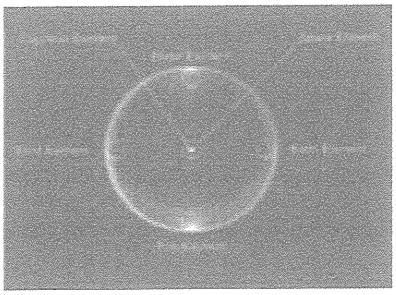
Another probable reason is the attempts made to disassociate itself from *Dhammakāya* meditation, which has been associated with Wat Dhammakāya particularly after the temple came under negative media scrutiny in 1998. This is because images of the body's nucleus, in the form of the four elemental spheres, are openly published in print and in websites of most centers teaching *Dhammakāya* meditation. These images are similar to the diagrams in the manuscript. See Fig. 26.

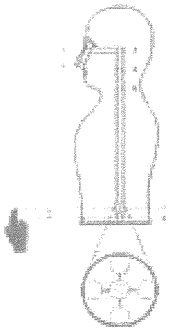
Figure 26: Comparison of the body's nucleus between *Matchima* and *Dhammakāya* Teachings



A pictorial diagram extracted from Venerable Suk's manuscript depicting the four elements of the body believed to be located around the navel

(Taken from Dr Metthanando's thesis which extracted this diagram from Venerable Suk's manuscript)





The four elements of the body's nucleus located at the center of the body which can be perceived 2 finger-breadths above the navel. This is taught in all centers teaching Dhammakaya meditation

(Taken from the book- The Heart of *Dhammakāya* Meditation by Phra Rajyanvisith, abbot of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram)

This demonstrates the similarity in teachings between the *Matchima* and *Dhammakāya* tradition pertaining to the nucleus located at the center of the body

Even Newell's research during her fieldwork indicates that the word *Dhammakāya* is a dirty word, particularly to Thais not involved in any of the temples practicing *Dhammakāya* mediation[9]

In view of this, it would be detrimental to Luang Pho Wira's efforts to publicize *Matchima* meditation and reach out to new practitioners, if Wat Ratchasittharam's books contain diagrams of the body's nucleus that are so similar to Wat Dhammakāya's pictures.

The placement of abstract concepts along the body

A comparison of Venerable Suk's pre-modern manuscript and the contemporary temple publications also reveal additional information not written explicitly in the manuscript.

From the manuscript, it is observed that some meditation techniques used for healing involve the placement of philosophical terms such as the seven constituents of enlightenment (โพชฌงค์๗ประการ) along the nine bases. The manuscript assumes that the reader would already possess the knowledge on which base they are to be placed. Even Mano in his translation of the manuscript has to rely on guesswork to determine where to locate each constituent.[10] As such, he notes that the manuscript is scattered with meditation puzzles, which are encrypted.[11]

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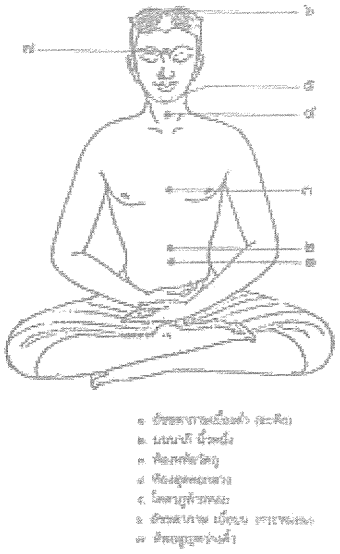
[9] Newell 2008: p. 261.

[10] See footnotes no. 557-559 under Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p.171.

[11] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p. 289.

The temple publication on the other hand, provides a diagram of a layperson with the seven constituents of enlightenment located along the corresponding bases of the body.[12] See Fig. 27.

Figure 27: Placement of the seven constitutions of enlightenment



Picture taken from temple publication – 2010

The temple publication 'Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases' revealing the placement of the Seven Constitutions of Enlightenment along some of the nine bases.

The location for this placement is not mentioned in the Venerable Suk's manuscript.

Another example is seen in the instruction on the use of magic mantras involving the use of the chant '*itipi so phakkhawa*' and '*namo phut tha ya*'.[13] These mantras were used for protection from harm and were written in numerous combinations in the pre-modern manuscript. A reader untrained in this meditation

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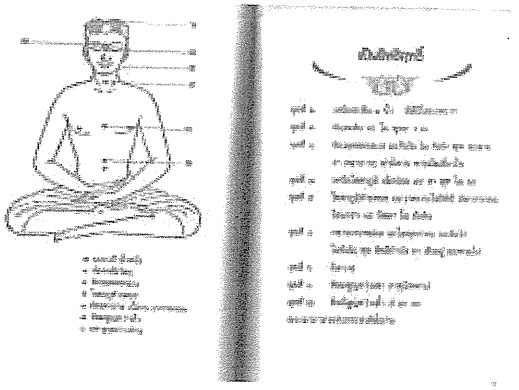
[12] See Luang Pho Wira's book on *Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases (กรรมฐานแก้กรรมรักษาโรค)* 2008: pg. 139.

[13] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p.160.

practice would probably just recite them offhand from the manuscript, thinking that it would produce the desired effect. The temple publication however reveals that these chants are supposed to be used with the concentrated mind fixed at some of the nine bases. For instance, *itipi so phakkhawa* in base two and *namo phut tha ya* at base three.[14] See fig. 28.

Figure 28: Placement of magic mantras



The temple publication 'Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases' showing the placement of magic mantras along seven of the nine bases.

This is not mentioned in the Venerable Suk's manuscript.

Picture taken from temple publication- 2010

It is evident that the instruction of locating these abstract terms, chants and concepts along the body was transmitted orally to Luang Pho Wira who decided

[14] See Luang Pho Wira's book, *Meditation for Healing Kamma and Treating Diseases (กรรมฐานแก้กรรมรักษาโรค)* 2008: p. 149.

to include some of this information in his contemporary book. This reveals that the pre-modern manuscript was not supposed to be read as on it's own, but together with proper guidance from a qualified instructor.

Similarities

The initiation ritual and chants

The initiation ritual and the request to take refuge in the five entities comprising of the triple gem, the meditation instructor and the meditation system is similar to the teachings laid down in the manuscript. I note that the chant used for the initiation ritual today is derived from the manuscript. For instance, the use of the opening term *'ukāsa'* at the start of ritual, conveying the intention for commencement is still practiced today

The pre-meditation chants used in the 'living' *Matchima* system also seem to derive its source from some excerpts of the initiation chant written in the manuscript. Before commencing meditation at any level or room, the practitioner would verbally request to receive the required *nimit* or the experience necessary to pass into the next stage. Included in the chant is the request for spiritual assistance from the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, *Saṅgha* and a Venerable Konthanya who is attributed to be the first Buddhist monk and founder of both *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation.[15] The request for spiritual assistance from these four entities is also found in the manuscript.

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[15] See footnote no. 94 in Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: p.36-37.

The Emphasis on the Five Joys (pīti)

Teachings regarding the second part of the manuscript, mentioning the five joys (*pīti*) and its characteristics have been incorporated into the first level of the 'living' *Matchima* system.

By comparing the temple publications on the *Matchima* meditation with the second part of the manuscript on the five joys (*pīti*), I discovered that the temple publication has censored information about the various colours, sensations, animal signs and Buddhas of the cosmos associated with each of the five joys that are mentioned in the manuscript. This could be an indication that these sensations or images are related to the *nimits* that the practitioners should experience when they have attained that stage. The reason why they were revealed in the manuscript is the possibility that it was meant for meditation instructors and not for amateurs as mentioned earlier.

Although this information has been made esoteric and not revealed in the contemporary temple publications, the same books provide additional information, not found in the pre-modern manuscript. This includes the placement of the five joys along the torso of the body and the use of the meditation device, which is a critical practice while undergoing training in that level. As we have seen in Chapter 5, these are shown in the form of visual images of a layperson meditating with the accompanying digrams.

A point to note is that such technical information is of course useless to a reader who is untrained in *Matchima* meditation, or who has not even reached the stage of experiencing the five joys. Nonetheless, the pictures and diagrams provide some form of fascination for an outsider, unfamiliar with these practices not commonly seen in contemporary meditation systems.

Conclusion

Comparing the pre-modern texts and the 'living tradition' taught at the temple today provides insights into the evolution of the meditation system. I will attempt to analyze this in conjunction with the field and literary data, which have been examined in the previous chapters. These findings will all be discussed in the conclusion (Chapter 7).

7

Philosophical Implications and Historical Context

Introduction

This final chapter provides an analysis of the data collated from literary and field-research work. To achieve this, I will examine the philosophical implications of the *Matchima* meditation system for Buddhist practice in Thailand and attempt to place this 'living tradition' passed down by the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuean in its proper historical context. The philosophical and historical approach undertaken in this conclusion chapter will in my opinion, shed insight into broader issues, trends and themes that have dominated Thai civilization both in the past and the present.

Philosophical implications for Buddhist practice in Thailand

My study of the *Matchima* meditation system contributes to the on-going discourse on what constitutes 'right' practice in Buddhism. In contemporary Thailand, there has been debate regarding the correct practice as taught by the Buddha according to the instructions laid down in the eight-fold path, particularly in the seventh and eight aspects of 'Right Concentration' and 'Right Mindfulness'. 'Right Concentration' according to established interpretations, is often interpreted

to mean the practice of *samādhi* and entering meditative absorption known as *jhāna* [1].

In chapter 2, we observe different meditation traditions having conflicting opinions about the practice of *samatha* and to what degree before practicing insight. The *Matchima* meditation system contributes to this debate. It places vital importance on mastering jhāna to the highest levels before proceeding to insight. On the other spectrum, we have the Burmese *Vipassanā* School of meditation, which claims that it is not important for one to develop intensive states of concentration or even enter the *jhānas* as one can practice insight meditation right away. This dispute is inevitable due to the fact that there is no clear instruction in the Pali *suttas* on how much concentration one should develop before turning to insight.[2]

Although the scriptures are important, the *Matchima* meditation system also claims legitimacy and authenticity from the aspect of lineage and history. Luang Pho Wira sees himself as the heir to a tradition of esoteric practices going back to the Buddha and his son Rāhula, and that it was once practiced as a common system within the larger Theravāda Buddhist world. As we have seen in Chapter 5, he made reference to this affinity of practices that existed around the mainland Southeast Asian region and Sri Lanka by collectively terming those who practiced this meditation method as '*Phra Yokhawacara*' (พระโยควาจร). Modern scholarship by Bizot has also contributed to this shared affinity, as shown in pictures of similar practices conducted in Cambodia in a book written by Bizot, which Luang Pho Wira owns.

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[1] Gethin 1998: p. 81.

[2] Gethin 1998: p. 188.

The claim to legitimacy on account of lineage overrides the sole reliance on textual authority. Contemporary meditation methods base their legitimacy mainly on how closely they adhere to the words of the Buddha in the canonical texts. These newer traditions insist that the fundamentals of their techniques are found in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness) or the *ānāpānasati-sati sutta* (The Mindfulness of Breathing). This epistemological viewpoint however, as I have examined in Chapter 3, occurred relatively early around the nineteenth century with the epoch of western colonialism and the influence of the fourth and fifth reigns. It is seen that the rise of contemporary meditation movements was facilitated and made possible with the availability of the canonical texts to the public due to the introduction of the printing press around the 1830s.

In contrast, the techniques taught by the *Matchima* meditation system do not need to prove that they come from the Pali canon. This was observed when the practitioners were asked whether the healing component of the *Matchima* meditation system or the emphasis on attaining the right *nimit* required for advancing to the next stage was considered 'orthodox' based on the Theravāda scriptures. Luang Pho Wira's reply was that in the lineage tradition, there were some teachings of the Buddha, not mentioned in the texts. This was why reliance on a reliable teacher is of paramount importance as there were esoteric aspects that were not revealed to the public. In addition, from his perspective, the use of the healing modality in the *Matchima* meditation system in attaining physical health and mental calm is 'orthodox' as it is considered a part of *samatha* training, since it enables the mind to remain clam and thus strong enough to conduct *vipassanā*.

According to McDaniel's research into how Buddhism was transmitted traditionally in the past in Thailand and Laos, the teacher monk was a highly revered figure. He was considered the representative of the Buddha and did not need to prove that what he taught came directly from a legitimate edition of the Pali canon.[3] The teacher monk was empowered to interpret the words of the Buddha in the sacred texts based on teachings imparted from his lineage coupled with his own meditative experiences.

In my view, the interpretation and transmission of Buddhist practice in the aspect of the *Matchima* meditation system reflects this pre-modern traditional view. This is seen in the importance placed on the role of the meditation instructor (Luang Pho Wira) whose technical expertise and knowledge in instructing the *Matchima* meditation system is derived from a long lineage and tradition, and not merely from the Buddhist texts.

Placing the *Matchima* meditation system in historical context

Temple discourse claims that the 'living' *Matchima* meditation tradition taught at Wat Ratchasittharam is the original system of meditation practice passed down by Gautama Buddha to his son Rāhula. Literature produced by the temple insists that the levels taught in the *Matchima* system have remained intact via an unbroken lineage of teachers. While I am not in a position to refute this claim, I deem this highly unlikely as more than 2,500 over years have eclipsed since the passing of the historical Buddha. It is most likely that even if there was an original meditation system, it would naturally have adapted or evolved over this vast span of time.

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[3] McDaniel 2008: p. 180.

Although temple discourse claims that *Matchima* meditation was the main practice for monks in the Ayutthaya period before the proliferation of 'unorthodox' practices after the Burmese invasion, evidence points to the fact that there existed many different schools of meditation at that time. This is seen in Phra Maha Chai Yasotharat's book '*Samādhi and Vipassanā Kammaṭṭhāna of the Four Eras*' which records different meditation styles, described in palm leaf manuscripts, widely practiced during the Ayutthaya, Vientiane, Thonburi and early Bangkok periods.[4] Although belonging to separate meditation traditions, these schools appear to be variations of each other, as seen in the similar manner in which they allocate bases along the body for the development of *samādhi* for healing and solving problems.[5] The *Matchima* meditation system, if it did exist at that time, could not be the only meditation tradition during the Ayutthaya era.

Chai's book claims that the meditation teachings of Venerable Suk only became prominent during the early Bangkok period. Nonetheless, despite this later dating, what we are certain of is that the meditation teachings contained in the manuscript of the Venerable Suk can be classified under the *Yogāvacara* tradition, which had existed in the region of mainland Southeast Asia for centuries. My research provides evidence for this as seen in Chapter 4. This suggests that Venerable Suk's teachings were possibly a later development or evolution of the different *Yogāvacara* meditation traditions that were once popular in the time of Ayutthaya.

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[4] หนังสือพุทธรังษีธฤษญาณ ว่าด้วยสมถและวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐาน๔ยุค. I have discussed this book and Phra Maha Chai's background in Chapter 4, p. 51.

[5] In Chai's book, four meditation traditions that were popular in the Ayutthaya period include instructions on techniques that use nine or seven bases for healing during meditation. Even if nine bases were used, similar to the *Matchima* system, the locations would be different. Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp.295-303.

It is possible to deduce that the 'living' *Matchima* meditation system, now taught at Wat Ratchasittharam, was possibly a synthesis or an amalgamation of different meditation practices that Venerable Suk had inherited. A clue is seen in the fact that Venerable Suk's manuscript, which he had passed down as part of his legacy, is a combination of three separate, unrelated texts even though, according to Chai or temple discourse, they are attributed to being part of a single meditation system.

Far from being part of a single system, the three manuscripts were composite texts written by different authors from different meditation traditions in the time of Ayutthaya.[6] Moreover, the history passed down by Wat Ratchasittharam about these texts were that they were originally owned by different meditation instructors whom the Venerable Suk met in the forest and sought instruction towards the end of the Ayutthaya era. However, I believe that to maintain the impression that the three texts were part of the same meditation system, temple discourse claims that all these meditation masters whom the Venerable Suk encountered were from the same forest or Wat Pakaew lineage.

It is my theory that *Matchima* meditation only emerged as a single tradition and became systemized during the time when the Venerable Suk was appointed as the head of meditation instruction during the early Bangkok era (1782) and was assigned to instruct what was deemed 'orthodox' meditation derived from Ayutthaya to a multitude of monks, as well as to appoint disciples, who would become future teachers of the system too.

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[6] Mettanando Bhikkhu 1998: pp.316-317.

It would thus make sense to coalesce these separate, disparate meditation teachings into a single 'road-map' or product. Systemization of the teachings into a clear format would facilitate the process of its transmission to future generations. This is in contrast to the method of one-to-one personal instruction where the teacher would have to be well versed in the personalities and temperament of each and every student. Such a personalized method of instruction would take a long time and would not be a practical approach for an emerging center of meditation during the early Bangkok era.

From my observations of the temple grounds coupled with oral histories and temple literature as seen in Chapter 5, Wat Ratchasittharam was a popular center of meditation instruction during the reigns of the first three kings. This is seen in the existence of many meditation huts constructed around the ordination hall. The fact that these huts are no longer in use today and that all the *khanas* which once used to provide instruction in *Machima* meditation have been reduced to just one-*Khana* 5, is physical evidence that its popularity has dwindled. A poster promoting *Dhammakāya* meditation by Wat Dhammakāya on the premises of what once used to be a center of meditation in the kingdom is in my opinion ironic. It reveals the changing tide of historical circumstances, with the ascension of one meditation tradition by another.

From oral and literary accounts, the decline of this system can be attributed two main historical factors:

1. The impact of reforms during the reigns of King Rama 4 and King Rama 5.
2. The rise of contemporary meditation movements and their appeal to the emerging middle class.

We have observed in Chapter 3 how an interpretation of Buddhism that was heavily focused on doctrine and considered 'pristine' under the influence of King Rama 4 eventually became one of the tools used for ideological unification of the country. Monks belonging to different monastic lineages and traditions living within the borders of the nation-state were unified under one centralized control and ranked under an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Although this 'pristine' Buddhism did not impose its views on what constituted right meditation, the practice of meditation became devalued in place of scholarly pursuits as it was the only means for the state to measure ability and for an aspiring monk to rise up the ecclesiastical 'corporate' ladder. This was the reason why some academics such as Taylor have noted the gradual replacement of meditation abbots in temples by literary scholars who were well versed in the Pali scriptures towards the end of the fifth reign.[7]

In addition, the reforms during the fifth reign, particularly in the aspect of education, resulted in a greater emphasis on western science and the superiority of western allopathic methods of treatment. This resulted in the decline of traditional healing practices using herbs, chants and meditation, which were once under the purview of monks. Tiyavanich claims that this shift began with the establishment of the first modern hospital (Sirirat Hospital) in Thonburi, Thailand in 1888.[8]

These reforms relating to the centralization of the saṅgha and the shifting emphasis on scholastic education would naturally contribute towards the decline of interest in meditation practice since it was not a worthwhile investment for career advancement, particularly for ambitious monks, and did not serve the mundane needs and concerns of the society like before.

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[7] This was observed in the case of Wat Sangwet, See Taylor 1993: p. 41.

[8] Tiyavanich 2003: p. 335.

The popularity of lay mass meditation movements, which arose around the second half of the 20th century, is another aspect contributing towards the decline of *Matchima* meditation practice. The earliest moments was first seen with the fervent promotion of *Dhammakāya* meditation in the 1930s[9] and later on the Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation in the 1950s. It is interesting to note that the nature of this promotion, starting with *Dhammakāya* meditation was unprecedented in Thai history.[10] This was in contrast to the past where meditation was always considered a solitary activity, done in the forest and based on individual initiative.[11] In addition, meditation styles and techniques promoted by the two schools were less complex and embodied concepts easy for the layperson to understand. They were perceived to provide the practitioner with quick results and were more appealing in the sense that they focused on achieving 'inner peace' or mental health or as a technique in reducing stress.[12] This was thus appealing to the middle-classes who saw it as beneficial to their lifestyle.

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[9] Although the *Dhammakāya* meditation system came much earlier than the movement espoused by Wat Dhammakāya, it nonetheless gained a popular following when its founder, Luang Pho Sot was the abbot at Wat Paknam. For more details about the propagation of *Dhammakāya* meditation by Luang Pho Sot when he was still alive, see *An Analysis of Phra Mongkol-Thepmuni's (Sodh Candasaro) Buddha Dhamma Propogation* by Mae Chee Amphai Tansomboon (2004).

[10] Some academics, such as Tiyavanich have claimed that the fever to promote meditation was due to rivalry and competition between the *Thammayut* and the *Mahanikay*. While modern state-Buddhism, espoused by the royally supported *Thammayut* deemphasized the importance of meditation, the *Mahanikay*, which comprised of an amalgamation of different traditions promoted it via the establishment of schools and meditation centers in the temples in an attempt to gain lay support. See Tiyavanich 1997: Chapter 9.

Also, even within the *Mahanikai* traditions, there appeared to be competition between the two temples, represented by Wat Paknam and Wat Mahathat who were actively propagating their own meditation systems to as many lay people as possible in Bangkok and the outlying provinces. This information was obtained from practitioners who used to reside at Wat Paknam in the 1950s.

[11] Mae Chee Amphai Tansomboon 2004: p. 53.

[12] McDaniel 2008: p. 253.

Furthermore, these contemporary movements were seen as more inclusive and ideologically aligned with the world-view of the rising middle-classes whom Peter Jackson claims opposed the metaphysical royalist form of Buddhism, which legitimized the hierarchical establishment through justifications of one's *kamma*. [13] Thus, the reason why contemporary meditation movements such as Burmese *Vipassanā* was popular was because it did not require one to dedicate a tremendous amount of time to developing *samādhi*, of which success depended on the possession of an adequate amount of spiritual resources.

This was in contrast to the past where the ex-prime minister, Kukrit Pramoj mentioned that even the term *vipassanā* was not mentioned openly in Thai society and that only someone of high spiritual caliber could practice it. He mentioned: "In olden times, when a child asked its elders about *vipassanā* (insight meditation)... no one spoke. They said it was a secret. The instructors ordered not to let just anyone be taught, the student had to be chosen. It was not widespread teaching."[14]

The *Matchima* meditation system, with its emphasis on rituals, chants, complex exercises and the many levels one had to pass before finally graduating to *vipassanā* was thus representative of this archaic past. It is thus easy to see how this would contribute towards the *Matchima* system's eventual demise due to the onslaught of simpler and 'more effective' meditation styles, which complimented the interests of the rising middle-class. The onslaught and subsequent domination of these newer meditation styles is perhaps the reason why existing practitioners at Wat Ratchasittharam view *Dhammakāya* meditation and the Burmese *Vipassanā* meditation in a negative and condescending light, describing them as 'inferior' or

[13] Peter Jackson 1990: p.49.

[14] Pater Jackson 2003: p. 165.

'watered down' versions of the original system taught by the Buddha (I have examined these perceptions in Chapter 5).

However, despite historical circumstances within the last hundred years that have led to its decline, my research indicates that the *Matchima* meditation system continues to serve a niche in Thai society today. I have noted that practitioners who are attracted to the *Matchima* meditation system are those who do not find the characteristics of contemporary meditation schools appealing.

In her book, 'Keeping the Faith- Thai Buddhism at the Crossroads', Sanitsuda Ekachai mentions the appeal of alternative spiritual practices imported into Thailand due to the demystification of Thai Buddhism.[15] Buddhism thus became 'dry and lacking the charm needed to meet the people's emotional needs which go beyond rationality.'[16] In addition, the monastic reforms have resulted in an increasing alienation of monks in urban areas who have become more interested in monastic projects and catering to the wealthy as source of funds for temple development, resulting in the decline of their role as educators and their ability to meet the spiritual needs of the laity.[17]

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[15] Sanitsuda Ekachai 2001: see the chapter, 'Shopping for Spirituality', pp. 237-246.

[16] Quotation from Phra Paisal in Saitsuda Ekachai 2001: p. 243.

[17] Phra Rajavaramuni 1981: p. 20.

From my perspective, the esoteric elements of the *Matchima* meditation system and the personalized way it is taught provides an answer to this spiritual vacuum that is experienced by a segment of Thai people today, who rather than looking for a spiritual product outside the country, are turning their attention within and towards their own homeland, to a practice that is ancient, traditional and depicted as 'lost' in recent times.[18]

This is where the role of Luang Pho Wira, the meditation instructor of *Khana* 5 is significant. Through his attempts in publicizing the meditation system with the aim of attracting potential practitioners, he has promoted certain characteristics of *Matchima* meditation so that it is packaged as distinctive and uniquely different from the mass contemporary meditation movements in Thailand. This is seen in the attention paid to the initiation ritual, the importance placed on esotericism (i.e. characteristics of *nimits* and the secrecy of reporting them), the importance of the systematic levels, the use of meditation for healing and the personalized method of instruction (as opposed to scheduled group sessions, limited by *Khana* 5 physical space). It is precisely these aspects of the *Matchima*

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[18] In my view, the *Matchima* system fulfills the emotional needs of the practitioner due to the one-on-one, personalized attention provided by the instructor Luang Pho Wira who is on call 24 hours a day. *Matchima* meditation practitioners I interviewed claim that this is in contrast to scheduled, group meditation sessions, which they have experienced elsewhere in any one of the five contemporary meditation movements examined in Chapter 2, where instruction is given 'wholesale' to the mass audience. The *Matchima* living tradition, through meeting the emotional needs of the *Matchima* practitioners, makes them feel more grounded and connected to their practice. Another reason why this system fulfills the emotional needs of practitioners is due to its healing component. The rectification of physical ailments and mundane concerns would alleviate the emotional stress most people would have to endure in daily life.

meditation system which practitioners today find appealing as I have examined from the responses of my interviews seen in Chapter 5.[19]

From my comparison of the teachings in the manuscript and what is taught in *Khana* 5 today, I have also discovered that the 'living tradition' has chosen to include or exclude certain aspects of the teachings with the purpose of making it a 'saleable' product for this niche market of practitioners. This is observed in the exclusion of information regarding the *nimits*, as seen in the omissions of diagrams revealing the body's nucleus in the form of the four elements, and even the characteristics of the five joys as they are classified as esoteric in the *Matchima* system. On the other hand, inclusion of additional information not found in the manuscript is observed in the publication of information and pictures on exercises one would have to perform in the foundational stages and the placement of abstract concepts on the human body. In my opinion, these diagrams are impressive and would definitely capture the attention and interest of a new practitioner.

Besides appearing impressive, the nature of these diagrams used for meditation practice and for healing suggest that this system emphasizes a lot on strengthening the mind to its highest ability, probably more so than other meditation schools. This would be an attractive selling point for today's practitioners who desire a stable mind derived from concentration to counteract the stress of modern living. I note that the findings in my questionnaire (Chapter 5) reveals that this is the main reason why many are drawn to *Matchima* meditation.

[19] Although the majority of practitioners I interviewed in Chapter 5 derive from the educated 'middle-classes', I note that all practitioners, inclusive of monks and *maechis*, are interested in this system for similar reasons cited above.

Another method employed in attracting new practitioners and maintaining the commitment of existing practitioners is the ingenious use of literature (abstract), coupled with the existence of historical buildings and artifacts (material). Reading the temple publications about the Venerable Suk's life and the history of the *Matchima's* lineage while walking along the temple grounds creates a multi-sensory experience as perceived history recounted in the books virtually 'comes alive'. It is for this purpose that the museum is located just before the meditation chamber in *Khana* 5. As such, both the abstract and material sources complement each other in creating the mythos for the practitioners, establishing their identity, purpose and motivation for continuing their practice.

While the emphasis on certain characteristics of the *Matchima* meditation teachings is necessary for it to be appealing to a certain segment of Thais, the system also needs to adapt to the environment to cater to the needs of a new profile of practitioners. My analysis in Chapter 5 reveals that the majority is from the educated middle-class group, who are only free to practice at the temple during holy days or festive occasions. One adaptation is seen in the initiation ritual. While the ritual has retained its essence in terms of the respect paid to the five entities and usage of the term '*ukāsa*' in the chants, it is no longer performed only on Thursdays as was the custom and the items for the ceremony are no longer prepared by the initiate but by the monks in the temple. From my own experiences, even stumbling over some Pali words is not an issue. This was probably not the case in the past. Even the procedure of informing the meditation instructor personally about one's experiences has been dispensed with, and a phone call can be conveniently made instead. Thus, certain aspects of the meditation system are performed at the convenience of the practitioner who due to modern day demands, is often laden with commitments.

Another adaptation, in an attempt to promote the meditation to potential students is observed with the healing modality made more accessible to practitioners who have not even qualified for the *vipassanā* stage. The ability to meditate on the nine bases is depicted as something achievable after one completes the basic foundational stage. This is in contrast to the past where this method was only taught to advanced students who had completed the highest levels in the *Matchima* system. This achievement would most likely require an entire lifetime of commitment.

However, despite several adaptations made in contemporary times, the system can in essence, still be considered under the rubric of the *Yogāvacara* tradition and continues to conform to Crosby's definition seen in Chapter 4. An example is seen in the continued use of magical formulas and abstract philosophical concepts as objects that can be placed along the body to facilitate healing, solving problems and one's advancement along the soteriological path.

While this tradition doesn't seem to be dying out due to the lack of interest, the main danger of the tradition becoming extinct as I analyze it is due to its rigidity and strict requirements, which the potential successor has to fulfill before he can be recognized by Wat Ratchasittharam as a qualified instructor. For instance, besides possessing the innate ability, the potential teacher is also required to invest a tremendous amount of time and commitment to mastering all the levels. Luang Pho Wira has trouble finding a candidate who is dedicated to the system or will commit to ensuring that the integrity of the entire teachings are kept intact.

Nonetheless, even with the extinction of the *Matchima* system in the future, this lineage of the *Yogāvacara* tradition will continue to survive in other manifestations in Thai society today, seen in the form of other lineages that can be considered 'off-shoots' from the *Matchima* meditation system.

Although research conducted by Mano and Newell have laid the groundwork suggesting that the origins of *Dhammakāya* meditation could possibly have been derived from the *Matchima* tradition, the data examined in this book provides further evidence for this. This is examined from oral accounts claiming that Luang Pho Sot had studied in the temple before, comparisons between the two school of meditation teachings and experiences of practitioners who were trained in both systems.

My research has shed light into the fact that both systems of meditation have the same teachings about the nucleus of the body congregating in spherical elements around the navel area. This is not found in other Buddhist meditation schools, where the concept of body's nucleus located around the navel is foreign to the Pali canon and the commentaries. It is possible that the teaching could have been derived from yogic practices from India before the arrival of Theravāda Buddhism, or was a concept indigenous to the region. [20] We note that in *Dhammakāya* meditation, practitioners are taught that focusing in this area is necessary for one to perceive these elements. Although the expectation to see the

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[20] This is also similar to the teachings found in the Sri Lankan *Yogāvacara's* Manual which advocates moving one's attention to the navel after one has attained concentration (represented by a 'brightness') at the tip of the nose. After which, the states of mind will be represented in the form of elements. This similarity could be either due to the influence of practices that came with the Siamese order in the 16th century or it was already part of the broader practice of Theravāda Buddhism within these countries. Rhys Davids 1981: pp. XI-XII.

image of the body's nucleus is not taught in the *Matchima* system, perhaps to protect practitioners from imagining the image, it is nonetheless implied.

According to Luang Pho Wira, the navel position, where the body's basic elements are located is also where the re-birth consciousness (*bhavanga*) is located. After the re-birth consciousness attaches itself to the mother's womb, this is followed by the growth of the head, limps and other organs emerging from the nucleus, thus forming the fetus. The nucleus of the human body is thus located at the navel, where it has always been. I note that this philosophy is shared with an interpretation of *Dhammakāya* philosophy under Phra Terry Magness, a disciple of Luang Pho Sot, who had resided in Wat Paknam temple in the 1950s.[21] In one of his books, he mentioned that that the location of the body's elements is also at the navel. For one to perceive the sphere where the elements are located, one must view it from a distance. This is why in *Dhammakāya* meditation, one is taught to edge up one's consciousness (the peripheral mind) two-finger breadths above the exact location of the elements (the navel), otherwise there will be no full awareness

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[21] Phra Terry Magness was personally trained by *Maechi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan, one of the eminent first generation disciples of Luang Pho Sot at Wat Paknam temple. Phra Terry is a respected authority and practitioner of *Dhammakāya* meditation. He is the author of several English language books about the subject and other Dhammakāya institutions often quote his works or use his books to promote the *Dhammakāya* meditation system. This was observed at Wat Paknam which currently distributes his books to English speaking visitors. Newell notes that his books are an important resource for students of *Dhammakāya* meditation. Even his writing about Luang Pho Sot's life has been partially plagiarized by Wat Dhammakāya. See Newell 2008: pp. 77-79. My own undergraduate research reveals that he is well known amongst high-level practitioners of *Dhammakāya* meditation in Wat Paknam, Wat Luang Pho Sodh Dhammakayaram and Wat Dhammakāya. See Patrick Ong, *In Search of the Dhammakaya,* Bachelors Thesis (Honours), Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, National University of Singapore, 2001. I have had the privilege of being acquainted with Phra Terry Magness for many years through my maternal grandfather who is a close friend of his. They have been friends since the 1950s while practicing *Dhammakāya* meditation together at Wat Paknam.

and only submergence in the subconscious stream (*bhavanga-sotā*).[22] Luang Pho Wira echoes a similar view where he claims that it does not matter where the practitioner focuses his/her attention, for instance, it could be the left or right of the navel, as long as it's around the location of the elements.

Even Luang Pu Man, another prominent meditation teacher who is believed to have studied at Wat Ratchasittharam has meditation teachings making references to a similar sphere, which he calls the '*Buddho* Sphere'. He describes it as a crystal sphere of multiple colours located within the physical body, which enables one to see heaven and hell.[23]

This concept, although not found in the 'orthodox' Pali scriptures, is a common teaching found in the *Yogāvacara* tradition. For example, one ancient text from this tradition instructs the practitioner to bring his attention down to the area that was once attached to the womb of the mother. This practice would enable him to perceive a 'holy light' that is as bright as the sun and moon.[24]

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[22] Magness (*The Long View- An Excursion into Buddhist Perspectives*) 2007: Appendix 2. Retrieved from http://www.triple-gem.net/BookList.html [2010, 25 December). Interviews conducted with Phra Terry Magness in Feb 2010 indicate that he is unaware of the existence of the *Matchima* meditation system. If given the opportunity, my intention is to explore the teachings of Phra Terry Magness, which I consider an interesting evolution from the teachings of Luang Pho Sot and in my view, a further development of the *Yogāvacara* tradition in Thailand.

[23] Potprecha Cholvijarn. *An Examination of the Thought and Practice of Phra Rajyanvisith Sermchai Jayamangalo* (ongoing doctronal dissertation). Chapter 2, p. 23.

[24] L.S. Cousins 1997: p. 201. As we have read here in this chapter, the teaching in this text reflects the beliefs of Luang Pho Wira and Phra Terry Magness.

Implications for the notion of 'monolithic' Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand based on historical analysis of *Matchima* Meditation

By placing the *Matchima* meditation system in historical context, we are able to observe the lineal process of evolution and adaptation of this meditation tradition over a time span of around two hundred years since the arrival of the Venerable Suk to Bangkok.

The first evolution of the meditation system occurred with the need to systematize the various teachings Venerable Suk inherited into a single tradition known as the *Matchima* meditation system. I believe that this was due to the efforts of Venerable Suk himself who was appointed the head meditation instructor for the entire kingdom at Wat Ratchasittharam and also the need to train many monks who were royally appointed to propagate this system to others. The *Matchima* meditation system at that time was viewed by the ruling elites as the 'orthodox' version of Buddhist practice since Ayutthaya times.

The second evolution occurred in the twentieth to twenty first century with the decline in its popularity due to changing attitudes on what constituted Buddhist 'orthodoxy' and the rise of newer more 'progressive' meditation teachings. As we have observed, Luang Pho Wira has adapted the teachings of the *Matchima* meditation system to fit the needs of the modern contemporary Thai society to ensure its survival.

The third evolution is seen not from within the system itself, but due to the fact that it has contributed to the development of other meditation lineages and traditions, which I refer to as 'offshoots', since they have split from the original main, parent branch. My research has provided further evidence showing the close philosophical connection between the *Matchima* and the *Dhammakāya* meditation systems, suggesting that the latter is most likely an 'off-shoot' from the much older system. This is seen not only from comparing the teachings of the two traditions, but also from the personal experiences of practitioners themselves who have been trained in both of them. Due to the popularity of the *Matchima* meditation system, taught as the main medium of meditation instruction during the first three reigns, there is a high likelihood that it would have contributed to more 'off-shoot' meditation traditions in the past. This is a subject to be explored by future researchers.

While most historians and academics would conceive of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand as monolithic and inflexible, my research in examining the *Matchima* mediation system from the perspective of comparing both 'manuscript' and 'living tradition' argues for a more dynamic and multidimensional understanding of this subject. Although it is true that uniformity is seen in the case of doctrinal interpretation and the administration of the saṅgha,[25] the transmission, development and interpretation of Buddhist practices, seen in the aspect of meditation systems is fluid, malleable and adaptable in nature.

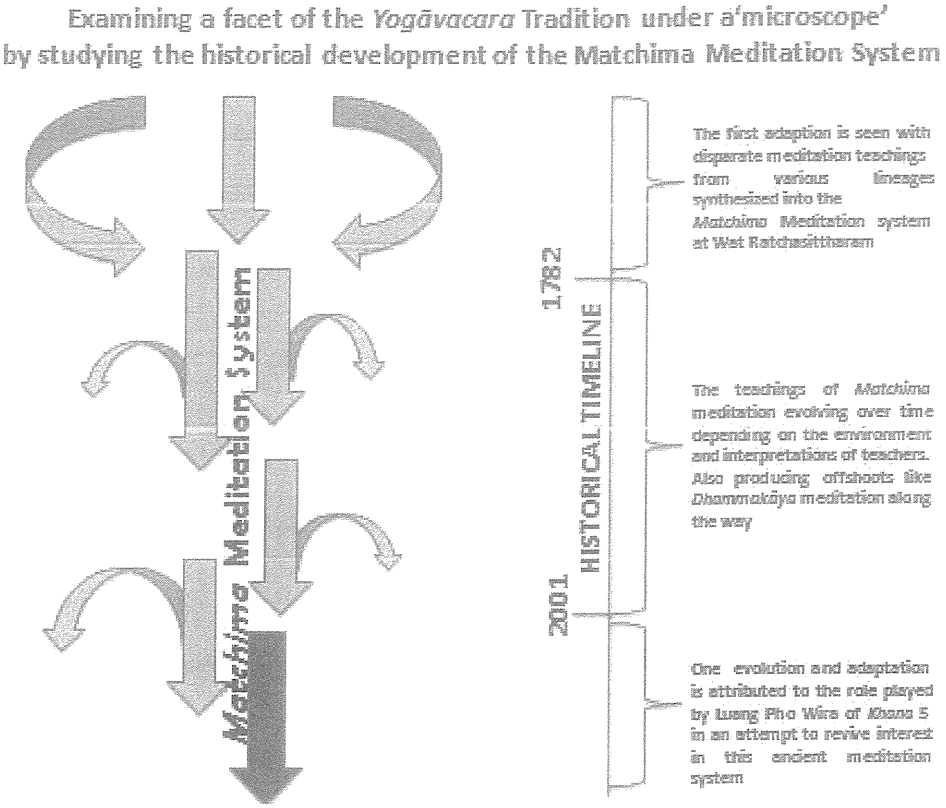
This reveals an interesting insight into the understanding of *Yogāvacara* meditation traditions in the region, a facet that this research hopes to contribute, in the arena of academic studies initiated by Bizot and Crosby. My study of the *Matchima* Meditation system under a 'microscope' has demonstrated that the

[25] Peter Jackson makes this claim, see Jackson 2003: p. 17.

Yogāvacara meditation tradition can be compared to a living organism, similar to an amoeba, since it is constantly evolving and adapting itself over time based on the needs of the changing environment and the actions of prominent individuals who facilitate this development.

Like an amoeba, the tradition gives birth to other 'offshoots', which in turn become separate lineages in their own right, becoming a main branch itself and experiencing the same process of development over time. See Fig. 29.

Figure 29: The *Yogāvacara* Tradition Under a Microscope


Examining a facet of the Yogāvacara Tradition under a 'microscope'
by studying the historical development of the Matchima Meditation System
Matchima Meditation System
1782
HISTORICAL TIMELINE
2001
The first adaption is seen with disperate meditation teachings from various lineages synthesized into the Matchima Meditation system at Wat Ratchasittharam
The teachings of Matchima meditation evolving over time depending on the environment and interpretations of teachers. Also producing offshoots like Dhammakāya meditation along the way
One evolution and adaptation is attributed to the role played by Luang Pho Wira of Khana 5 in an attempt to revive interest in this ancient meditation system

This in my opinion demonstrates that Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand is more dynamic, inclusive and multifaceted than previously conceived.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Buddhist Meditation: A Philosophical Reflection

According to the scriptures, the Buddha gained insights into the nature of reality, whilst deep in meditation under the bodhi tree. This reality was revealed to mankind in the form of the four noble truths, which can be summarized as:

1. The nature of suffering
2. The cause of this suffering
3. The way to the cessation of this suffering
4. The path leading to this cessation

The fourth noble truth describes a methodology which one has to adhere to in order to attain release from samsaric existence. This is referred to as the noble eight-fold path, which can be summarized as right conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).[1]These three dimensions are interconnected, with each aspect supporting the other, facilitating the goal towards release from suffering.

Before undertaking the practice of meditation, it is first necessary to fulfill two prerequisites. Firstly, one needs to possess the 'right view' or faith, which is trust that there is a way out from suffering. This is an affective form of faith, which is a positive emotional response to what one has heard which one will undertake to verify for oneself.[2] Expression of this faith is seen in conducting rituals such as

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[1] The noble eightfold path comprises of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

[2] Gethin 1998: p. 167.

taking the three jewels for refuge prior to every formal meditation session, devotion to relics and chanting of protective mantras from sutras.[3] In addition, faith also soothes the mind allowing it to be settled and composed.

Good conduct or *sīla* is the next prerequisite. By undertaking precepts, one aims to eradicate the roots and motivations of unwholesome behavior, which are often termed the grosser aspects of defilements.[4] This practice assists in the development of later meditational practices as the presence of unwholesome actions results in much guilt and remorse, adversely affecting one's sense of mental well-being. Adherence to precepts thus sets a wholesome pattern in the individual's mind.

These two prerequisites are common in all Buddhist meditation schools. Differences of opinion is seen with the technical aspects of the practice, dealing with training and purifying the mind. This is where conflicting opinions arise amongst the different meditation traditions in existence today.

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[3] This can also be interpreted as a form of preliminary meditation. The recollection of the Buddha is one of the themes of *samatha* or concentration meditation, bringing one close to *jhāna* or the level of access concentration. See Gethin 1998: p. 179.

[4] The gross defilements comprise of the ten courses of unwholesome action, consisting of three bodily courses of action (Taking life, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct), four vocal courses of action (lying, divisive speech, hurtful speech, frivolous speech), and three mental courses of action (covetousness, ill-will and wrong view).

The practice of Buddhist meditation comprises of two different methods namely:

- *Samatha*- Tranquility and Concentration
- *Vipassanā* - Insight

Samatha aims to calm the mind and bring it to a state of clarity. Techniques such as focusing on an abstract concept or an object of form are used to temporary suppress or block the immediate defilements.[5] These defilements are known as the five hindrances, which disturb the mind and prevent it from seeing into its true nature.[6] When this is done successfully, consciousness is loosened from crude external supports and the mind escapes the domain of the five senses.[7]

In escaping the 'sphere of the five senses', the meditator ascends states of meditative absorption or alternate consciousness known as *jhāna*. The threshold of *jhāna* is known as access concentration, marked by five stages of joy (*pīti*) and accompanied by three successive mental images or 'signs' (Thai: *nimit* / Pali: *nimitta*).[8] *Jhāna* is defined by the suppression of the five hindrances and the arising of the five limps, marked by thought, examination, rapture, pleasure and unification of mind. Advancing through the first to the fourth *jhāna* entails the release of these limps, eventually cumulating in an awareness purified by equanimity and balance. This progression through the four *jhānas* in the Pali scriptures is known as right

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[5] The Visuddhimagga lists fourty subjects for the purpose of *samatha*, while the Vimuttimagga lists 38. These texts state that the theme chosen for the practice of *samatha* depends on one's personality type. One's meditation teacher (*kalyāṇamitta*) will assist the practitioner in choosing the meditation theme.

[6] The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) are sensual desire, ill-will, tiredness and sleepiness, excitement and depression. Gethin 1998: p. 175.

[7] Gethin 1998: p. 176.

[8] This is from the interpretation of Upatissa and Buddhaghosa who describe the experiences of the meditator progressing towards access concentration. Gethin 1998: p. 181.

concentration.[9] Technically, this is where the process of stilling and calming the mind is complete. The fourth *jhāna* stage is where the Buddha is said to have attained his liberation and Buddhahood.[10]

The fourth *jhāna* stage also results in the acquisition of the higher knowledges (*iddhi*). It is noted that these powers are not considered miraculous, but are derived from the realization of natural laws hidden from the minds of ordinary people.[11] Some scriptures list them into three categories such as the recollection of past lives, knowledge of death and rebirth of beings, and the knowledge of destruction of the corruptions.[12]Despite the negative connotation associated with them in contemporary Thai society, there is no evidence that these abilities are disparaged in the Buddhist texts and can even be helpful in the path towards enlightenment.[13]

Beyond the fourth *jhāna*, the canonical scriptures and the commentaries mention the practice of the formless attainments.[14] In contrast to the systematic elimination of the grosser limps of *jhāna* as seen in the first to the fourth, progression here involves a shift in the object of concentration. This is achieved by changing the subject of one's concentration from a form object to a formless

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[9] Shankman 2008: p. 15.

[10] Yoshinori 1994: p. 88.

[11] Shankman 2008: p. 51.

[12] Some scriptures expand this list into six higher knowledges which include- *iddhis* or psychic powers, the divine ear, the ability to read minds, the ability to remember past lives, the divine eye and the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions. Shankman 2008: p. 50.

[13] Shankman 2008: p. 51.

[14] The four formless attainments comprise of: The base of the boundlessness of space, the base of the boundlessness of consciousness, the base of nothingness and the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception.

abstract concept.[15] As such, the formless states are called *arūpa* (without form) or *arūpa jhānas*, while the first four *jhāna* are called *rupa jhānas*.

The Buddhist view states that despite achieving refined states of consciousness and eliminating the grosser defilements, there is still the danger of the mind seeking peace in these subtler experiences. One interpretation views that the yogis of ancient India were able to reach the highest levels of concentrative absorption, thinking that this was the highest level of attainment. They were unfortunately unaware that even in these subtle experiences, there lurk defilements (*āsava*) not recognized for what they are and were thus not rooted out or made extinct.[16].

Aware of this shortcoming, Buddhism incorporated the practice of insight or *vipassanā* into its mind training regiment. This is the final practice in the elimination of the subtle defilements that bound one to samsaric existence.[17] *Vipassanā* is the cultivation of insight into the three marks of existence namely, impermanence, suffering and non-self. These three aspects define Buddhist teachings on phenomenal existence. In this practice, the mind settles not with an abstract concept as its object, but in the direct seeing of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation.[18]

The scriptures point that both *samatha* and *vipassanā* should ideally compliment each other where the mind eradicates grosser defilements for the subtle (via *samatha*) and finally letting go of the subtle defilements (via *vipassanā*).

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[15] Shankman 2008: p. 50.

[16] Magness (*Vistas- Buddhist insights into immortality*) 2007: p. 6. Retrieved from http://www.triple-gem.net/BookList.html [2010, 25 December].

[17] Gethin 1998: p. 200. Buddhism was thus believed to have inherited the concept of *jhāna* from the already pre-existing Indian Brahmanical yogic practices.

[18] Gethin 1998: p. 188.

In practice however, the point in which the meditator turns to the contemplation of phenomena (3 marks of existence) is not fixed in the ancient manuals or in modern practice.[19] There is no consensus on the degree of meditative absorption or whether *jhāna* is even necessary to realize the deeper stages of insight. Scriptural evidence can be found to support either view.[20] In actual practice, we find two extremities within a spectrum. One advocates practicing the *jhāna* fully then turning to insight, while the other advocates cultivating insight only with minimal calm and concentration.[21]

Since the practice of meditation is a living tradition, there are variations to how it manifests in different societies. This is seen especially in Thailand with the multitude of competing meditation systems and traditions living alongside each other.

[19] Gethin 1998: p. 188.

[20] Shankman 2008: p. 78.

[21] Gethin: 1998, p. 188.

APPENDIX B

Features of the *Yogāvacara* Tradition

Several theories have been put forth regarding the possible origins of the *Yogāvacara* tradition. Such theories propose influences of Mantrayana and Tantric Buddhism from India, Saivite influences from Cambodia, and development from Mon Buddhism. A more possible explanation provided by L.S Cousins was that it originated within the orthodox *Mahavihara* tradition. The *Mahavihara* tradition emerged as the dominant school in Sri Lanka during the twelfth century. It was a predominantly textual tradition and adhered strictly to the Pali language.[22] The emphasis on Pali terms is also seen with the *Yogāvacara* tradition, which solely uses it in its meditation texts and invocation of mantras. The fifth century author of the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa, who belonged to the *Mahavihara* tradition, mentioned the existence of secret texts in which hidden meanings were transmitted only from teacher to student. This was considered accepted practice then and reveals that the trend towards esoteric teachings in Theravāda Buddhism was already present before the fifth century.[23]

One main feature of this tradition is that despite the fact that much of its teachings and terminology are based on the Pali scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism,

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[22] The *Mahavihara nikaya* became the dominant tradition in Sri Lanka with the unification of the many Sri Lankan nikayas (monastic lineages) under the rule of King Parakramabahu I in the twelth century. The unification resulted in canonical texts and commentarial material being assessed by the ruling elite. This textual tradition was favored and Buddhaghosa's work was deemed to be the standard of orthodoxy. The *Thammayut* nikaya in Thailand bases its canonical and commentarial texts from this tradition in Sri Lanka. Crosby 2000: p. 144.

[23] L.S. Cousins 1997: p. 192.

they contain a deeper meaning behind what a literal reading of the scriptures would reveal. In a sense, this can be compared to a form of mysticism as seen in other religions such as the Kabbalah philosophy in Judaism. Mysticism is a philosophy providing an elaborate map of correspondences between the human body, the cosmos and some kind of higher reality or knowledge.[24] For instance, in some texts pertaining to the *Yogāvacara* tradition, an allegory pertaining to the spiritual path is used, as seen in an imagery of a fig tree, which is compared to the human body and the search for a crystal sphere within it that is linked to the quest for *nibbāna*.[25] In Cambodia, this tradition uses the Ramayana story and its characters as an allegory for the mental development of the *Yogāvacara* practitioner and his search for *nibbāna*.[26] The use of symbolism and metaphors with hidden meanings are characteristic of this tradition and often, the meanings are revealed orally and transmitted only to the disciple from the teacher of the same lineage.[27]

Another prominent feature of the *Yogāvacara* tradition is the numerous references made to the process of gestation and incubation in the mother's womb. These are used to explain spiritual exercises the practitioner undertakes and his experiences in meditation. It is noted that this comparison has no precedent in the canonical scriptures. For instance, in one text pertaining to this tradition, the monk's actions of prostration during a ritual is compared to the position of the fetus in the womb, and the seven items he carries are compared to the parts of the womb attached to the fetus.[28] Further, the traditional monastic dress in Southeast Asia

[24] L.S. Cousins 1997: p. 195.

[25] L.S. Cousins 1997: p. 195.

[26] Crosby 2000: p. 154.

[27] Crosby 2000: p. 146.

[28] L.S. Cousins 1997: p. 199-201. The seven items are the 1) the waist band which is the cord at the umbilicus, 2) the breast band is the end attached to the placenta, 3) The sash is the part which remains with the mother, 4) the stole is the bag of waters which contains a little blood, 5) the

was linked to the embryonic imagery found in the *Yogāvacara* texts. This is in contrast to the reformist *Thammayut* sect as it based its monastic attire on the canonical texts.[29] With regards to meditation methods, one *Yogāvacara* text instructs the practitioner to bring his attention down to the area that was once attached to the womb of the mother. This practice would enable him to perceive a 'holy light' that is as bright as the sun and moon.[30]

This emphasis on the use of maternal or embryonic imagery to describe spiritual evolution is perhaps why the verses and terms of the *Abhidhamma* play a significant role in the *Yogāvacara* tradition. The *Abhidhamma* describes in detail the psychological nature of the individual and links that nature to virtuous/non-virtuous actions and soteriological potentials.[31] Traditional accounts claim that the Buddha had expounded to his mother and the heavenly deities while he resided at the *Tavatimsa* heaven for three months. According to Justin McDaniel[32], the *Abhidhamma* was popularly used in Theravāda mainland Southeast Asian countries for many centuries not for the purpose of instructing Buddhist philosophy, but was chanted for ritualistic purposes and the creation of protective spells. The *Mātika*, the first part of the *Dhammasaṅganī* (the first of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma*) as well as syllables of the titles of the seven books were often used for this purpose.

McDaniel argues that the *Mātika* is a summery or condensed version of the entire *Abhidhamma* philosophy, comparing it to a seed in the womb of the mother

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cloaking robe is the amnion or the innermost membrane, 6) the inner robe is the placental envelope, 7) the under-robe is the pocket for excrement.

[29] Crosby 2000: p. 160.

[30] L.S. Cousins 1997: p. 201.

[31] McDaniel 2008: p. 229.

[32] Additional information can be obtained from McDaniel 2008: Chapter 8.

that could be further expanded. In a similar manner, the titles of the seven books can also be conceived as the seed or essence of the respective book. Chanting verses from the *Mātika* and the syllables from the titles of the *Abhidhamma* were thus believed to possess the potential to generate and grow health, protection and new life. As such, it was used in the creation of ephemeral fetuses, believed to protect the soul in its next rebirth during funerals and also used in the drawing of magical diagrams (Thai: *yan* / Pali: *yantra*) for protection. An example of it being used for spiritual practice in the *Yogāvacara* tradition can be observed in the research conducted by Bizot in Cambodia in the 1970s, where he observed a ritual conducted in a cave.[33] The cave was compared to the womb of a mother and the practitioners were instructed to chant the syllables of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma* in combination with breathing techniques for the purpose of meditation. This practice was believed to enable the practitioner to be reborn anew, equipped with higher spiritual attainments.

[33] Crosby 2000: p. 148-149.

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for Meditation Practitioners

Hello, I am a Master's Student doing a thesis about the *Matchima* meditation system. Could you assist me by responding to this questionnaire. Your answers will facilitate my analysis and enable more people to know about the existence of this ancient meditation practice. Thank you.

Please choose more than one answer if appropriate:

Personal Background

1) Gender: Male / Female
2) Occupation:
    a. Government Official
    b. Private Company
    c. Own Business
    d. Medical doctor
    e. Academic
    f. Housewife
    g. Student
    h. Monk/Nun
    i. Service industry
    j. Unemployed
    k. Others: _____

3) Education:
    a. Primary School
    b. Secondary School
    c. High School
    d. Bachelor's Degree (BA)
    e. Higher than Bachelor's degree (MA, PHD)
4) Age:
    a. 10-20
    b. 21-30
    c. 31-40
    d. 41-50
    e. 51-60
    f. 61-70
5) Marital Status:
    a. Single
    b. Married
    c. Divorced
    d. Widowed
6) Income per Month:
    a. Lower than 10,000 Bhat
    b. 10,000-20,000 Bhat
    c. 20,000-30,000 Bhat
    d. Higher than 30,000 Bhat
7) Are you from Bangkok or from around the provinces?

Encountering and Practice of the *Matchima*

8) How did you come to know about this meditation method?
    a. Relatives
    b. Friends

c. Books published by the temple
d. Television/Radio
e. Website of the temple/internet

9) Have you practiced other meditation methods before? If so, what types? Why did you change to this system?
10) How long have you been practicing this meditation method?
11) Which level are you currently at?
12) Have you used the meditation for healing diseases? If so, what kind of diseases? Did you find it effective?
13) How often do you practice it?
    a. Everyday
    b. More than once a week
    c. Others: _____
14) How often do you come to the temple to practice?
    a. More than once a week
    b. Once a week
    c. Once a month
    d. Others: _____
15) Which days do you come to practice at the temple?
16) Do you consult Luang Pho Wira often? How?
    a. At the temple
    b. Via the Phone
17) Where do you practice the meditation?
    a. Temple
    b. Home
    c. Others: _____
18) Do you often practice in groups? Or practice alone by yourself?
19) Have you practiced this meditation system in other temples?

Perceptions of *Matchima* Meditation

20) Why are you interested in this meditation system? How does it compare with other meditation systems?

a. It is the right method taught by the Buddha
b. It is an ancient, traditional Thai method of meditation
c. I like the personalized, individualized style of instruction
d. I am interested in the healing aspect of the system
e. It is the first meditation system I encountered
f. I like the structured and systematic method of instruction
g. Others: _____

21) What benefits do you get from this meditation practice?

22) What are you expectations from the practice of this meditation?

a. Reach *nibbāna*
b. Healing diseases/solving problems in life
c. Inner peace
d. Better concentration
e. Others: _____

23) Will you continue to practice this meditation technique in the future?

a. Yes
b. No

Why? _____

24) Would you recommend this form of meditation to others?

a. Yes
b. No

Why? _____

แบบสอบถามเรื่องการฝึกปฏิบัติสมาธิ

สวัสดีครับ
ผมเป็นนิสิตปริญญาโทจากจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัยกำลังทำวิทยานิพนธ์เกี่ยวกับการฝึกสมาธิภาวนาแบบสมถะ-วิปัสสนากรรมฐาน มัชฌิมา
อยากจะขอความกรุณาให้ท่านตอบแบบสอบถามนี้ครับ
คำตอบของท่านจะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการทำวิทยานิพนธ์ของผมและจะช่วยให้คนอื่นๆ ได้รู้จักแนวการปฏิบัติสมาธิที่เก่าแก่นี้ครับ ขอบคุณมากครับ

(คำถามบางข้อ ท่านสามารถเลือกคำตอบได้มากกว่าหนึ่งคำตอบ ตามความเหมาะสมครับ)

ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม

1) **เพศ: ชาย / หญิง**

2) **อาชีพ**
(ข้าราชการ /บริษัทเอกชน /ธุรกิจส่วนตัว /แพทย์, พยาบาล /ครู, อาจารย์ /แม่บ้าน /นักเรียน นิสิตนักศึกษา /พระภิกษุ, สามเณร, แม่ชี /รับจ้าง /ว่างงาน /
อื่น_____)

3) **การศึกษา**
(ป. 6/ม. 3/ม. 6 / ป.ว.ช., ป.ว.ส./ ปริญญาตรี / ปริญญาโท / ปริญญาเอก /
อื่นๆ_____)

4) อายุ
(10-20 ปี /21-30 ปี /31-40 ปี /41-50 ปี /
51-60 ปี /61-70 ปี /มากกว่า70 ปี /
อื่นๆ_____)

5) สถานภาพ
(โสด / สมรส / หม้าย / หย่าร้าง)

6) รายได้ต่อเดือน
(ต่ำกว่า 10,000 บาท /10,000-20,000
บาท /20,000-30,000 บาท / สูงกว่า 30,000
บาท)

7) ท่านมีภูมิลำเนาอยู่ในกรุงเทพฯ หรือต่างจังหวัด?
_____

8) ท่านรู้จักวิธีการปฏิบัติสมาธิแนวสมถะ-วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมาจากใคร
a. ญาติ
b. เพื่อน
c. หนังสือที่วัดจัดพิมพ์
d. โทรทัศน์ / วิทยุ
e. เว็บไซต์ของวัด
f. อื่นๆ: _____

9) ท่านเคยฝึกสมาธิตามแนวอื่นหรือไม่? เคย / ไม่เคย
ถ้าเคย ท่านฝึกสมาธิแบบใด?
(พุทโธ / ยุบหนอ-พองหนอ / ธรรมกาย /
อื่นๆ:_____)
และเหตุใดจึงเปลี่ยนมาฝึกตามแนวสมถะ-วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมา?
_____
_____

10)เหตุใดท่านจึงสนใจการฝึกสมาธิตามแนวสมถะ-
วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมา?
การฝึกแนวนี้มีความเหมือนหรือต่างจากแนวอื่นอย่างไร?
a. เพราะเป็นวิธีการที่ถูกต้องตามคำสอนของพระพุทธเจ้า
b. เพราะเป็นวิธีการฝึกที่เก่าแก่ของไทยที่มีมาแต่โบราณ
c. เพราะเป็นวิธีการฝึกสมาธิแบบแรกที่ได้ปฏิบัติ
d. เพราะสนใจการใช้ประโยชน์จากสมาธิในการรักษาโรค
e. เพราะชอบรูปแบบการสอนที่เน้นการฝึกตัวต่อตัวกับอาจารย์
f. เพราะชอบการสอนที่เป็นขั้นเป็นตอนชัดเจน
g. อื่นๆ_____
_____

11)ท่านฝึกสมาธิตามแนวสมถะ-
วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมามานานเท่าใด?_____(วัน /
เดือน / ปี)

12)ขณะนี้ท่านฝึกอยู่ในระดับใด?_____
___

13)ท่านเคยใช้การปฏิบัติสมาธิเพื่อรักษาโรคหรือไม่? (เคย / ไม่เคย)

ถ้าเคย ท่านใช้รักษาโรคอะไร?_____

ท่านคิดว่ารักษาได้ผลหรือไม่? (ได้ผล / ไม่ได้ผล)

14)ท่านฝึกสมาธิบ่อยครั้งเพียงใด?

(ทุกวัน / มากกว่าสัปดาห์ละครั้ง / อื่นๆ

_____)

15)ท่านมาฝึกสมาธิที่วัดราชสิทธารามบ่อยครั้งเพียงใด?

a. มากกว่าสัปดาห์ละครั้ง
b. สัปดาห์ละครั้ง
c. เดือนละครั้ง
d. อื่นๆ _____

16)ท่านมาฝึกสมาธิที่วัดราชสิทธารามในวันใดของสัปดาห์?

_____

17)ท่านปรึกษาหลวงพ่อเกี่ยวกับการปฏิบัติหรือไม่? อย่างไร?

a. มาปรึกษาที่วัด
b. ปรึกษาทางโทรศัพท์
c. อื่นๆ _____

18)โดยปกติ ท่านฝึกสมาธิที่ใด?

(วัด / บ้าน / อื่นๆ _____)

19)ท่านฝึกสมาธิแบบกลุ่มบ่อยครั้งเพียงใด

หรือปฏิบัติส่วนตัว?_____

20)ท่านเคยฝึกสมาธิแนวสมถะ-

วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมาจากวัดหรือสถานที่แห่งอื่น

(นอกจากวัดราชสิทธาราม) หรือไม่?ิ?

_____

21)ท่านได้รับประโยชน์อะไรจากการฝึกสมาธิแนวสมถะ-

วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมา?

_____

_____

22)ท่านคาดหวังอะไรจากการฝึกสมาธิแนวสมถะ-

วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมา?

a. บรรลุนิพพาน
b. รักษาโรค / แก้ปัญหาชีวิต
c. ความสงบ, สบายใจ
d. เพื่อให้จิตนิ่ง, ตั้งมั่นมากขึ้น
e. อื่นๆ _____

23)ท่านจะยังคงฝึกสมาธิแนวสมถะ-

วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมาต่อไปในอนาคตหรือไม่?

ฝึก / ไม่ฝึก

เพราะ_____

_____

24)ท่านจะแนะนำให้ผู้อื่นฝึกสมาธิแนวสมถะ-
วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมาหรือไม่

แนะนำ / ไม่แนะนำ

เพราะ_____

_____

Glossary

Abhidhamma: Known fully as the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, is the last of the three Pitakas (baskets) that constitute the Pali canon. The *Abhidhamma* describes in detail the psychological nature of the individual, and links that nature to virtuous/non-virtuous actions and soteriological potentials.

Ānāpāna-sati: 'Mindfulness on in-and-out-breathing', one of the most important exercises for reaching concentration (*samādhi*) and the four absorptions (*jhāna*). According to Buddhadāsa, it is superior to other meditation techniques as it incorporates both *samādhi* and *vipassanā.* Based on the *ānāpāna-sati sutta* or Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing, this practice uses the breath as a branch into the four foundations of mindfulness and thus a way to attain awareness of the four noble truths.

Anussati: 'Recollection', also, the theme of contemplation. Six recollections are described in the scriptures. Themes used for recollection are the Buddha, his doctrine, his community of noble disciples, morality, liberality and heavenly beings. Recollection on these themes support the practitioner in attaining wholesome states of mind that are conducive to the development of insight.

Bhāvanā: Literally translated as 'bringing into existence or being'. In the Buddhist context, it refers to 'mental development'. In the English language, it is loosely just termed meditation practice. There are two kinds of *Bhāvanā*; namely, *Vipassanā Bhāvanā* and *Samādhi Bhāvanā.*

Bhavañga: Literally translated as 'Ground of Becoming', it can loosely be translated as one's subconscious mind. In the Abhidhamma, it is the foundation or condition of existence and can be described as a flux or a stream (life continuum). All

experiences and impressions from one's past lives are stored here, occasionally emerging as subconscious phenomena.

Dhammakāya Meditation and Movement: A meditation system founded by one of Thailand's renowned monks, Luang Pho Sot. The meditation instructs one to bring all concentration and awareness two-finger breadths above the navel in order to perceive a bright crystal sphere. Depending on one's innate ability, this position will unlock a series of phenomena represented by bodies of increasingly refined consciousness, eventually culminating in the temporary experience of *nibbāna*. As a movement, this meditation system was first propagated extensively in Wat Paknam and later reached out to an even greater audience in Thailand and overseas under the administration of Wat *Dhammakāya*.

Dhammakāya: Literally translated as the 'Truth Body' or the "Embodiment of Truth", the *Dhammakāya* came to denote the eternal essence of all Buddhas residing in their own nibannic plane, whose physical bodies and have long perished.

Jhāna: Refers to a meditative state of 'absorption' which is attained through the practice of concentration (*Samādhi*). In this state, there is a suspension of fivefold sensory activity and the extinction of the five hindrances, namely; sensual desire, ill-will/anger, sloth/torpor, restlessness/worry and doubt.

Kalyāṇamitta: The Buddhist concept of "spiritual friendship" within Buddhist community life, applicable to both monastic and householder relationships. One involved in such a relationship is known as a "good friend," "virtuous friend," "noble friend" or "admirable friend". In the context of this book, it is used to refer to the relationship between the meditation teacher and student.

Kāya-gatā-sati: 'Mindfulness with regards to the body. In the Visuddhimagga, it refers to the contemplation on thirty-two parts of the body.

Khana: A Thai word referring to a department, section or division within a larger organization. In this book, it is often used to refer to a section of the temple dealing with scriptural or meditation studies, such as *Khana* 5.

Khandhas: The 'five groups of existence' or 'five groups of clinging' which make up the basic constituents of all physical and mental phenomena of existence. These appear to the ignorant man as his ego or personality. The five groups comprise of the corporeality group, the feeling group, the perception group, the mental-formation group and the consciousness group.

Kuti: A Kuti is a small structure, built on stilts, designed to house a monk. A typical Thai monastery consists of a number of these buildings grouped together on a shared terrace, either in an inward facing cluster or lined up in a row.

Maechis: Buddhist laywomen in Thailand occupying a position somewhere between that of an ordinary lay follower and an ordained monk. These women would undertake the eight precepts and can be found residing in monasteries or in dedicated communities.

Mahanikay: A term used by the Thammayut order to describe the collective traditions of monks within Thailand whose practices were deemed to have deviated from the Buddhist scriptures and portrayed to be steeped in customs, rites and rituals.

Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta: The scripture on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, comprising of *kāyānupassanā* (observation of the body), *vedanānupassanā* (observation of sensations), *cittānupassanā* (observation of the mind), and

dhammānupassanā (observation of the contents of the mind). In this scripture, the Buddha referred to this practice as the only way for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow, for extinguishing suffering, for walking on the path of truth and for realizing *nibbāna* (liberation).

Matchima Meditation: The meditation system termed by current practitioners, taught at Wat Ratchasittharam. They claim that it is an ancient form of meditation practice taught by the Buddha to his son, the Venerable Rahul and passed down via a long lineage of disciples. The meditation teachings were eventually passed down to the Venerable Suk who propagated it in the early Bangkok era from Wat Ratchasittharam.

Nimit (Pali: *nimitta*): Refers to a mark or sign that arises during meditation.

Pathibat (Pali: *Paṭipatti*) vs. *Pariyat* (Pali: *Pariyatti*): Refers to the act of 'learning the doctrine' (*Pariyat*) and 'practicing it' (*Pathibat*). Based on academic discourse about Thai Buddhism, monkhood in the country was divided into two distinct vocations, the urban monks who were devoted to scriptural study as opposed to the forest monks, who dedicated their lives to practice.

Pīti: Refers to a very specific joy associated with a state of deep tranquility during meditation. In English, it is often translated as "rapture" and is distinguished from the longer-lasting meditative "pleasure" or "happiness" (*sukha*) that arises along with *pīti*.

Samādhi: Literally translated as the mental state of being firmly fixed or yoked to an object or theme of contemplation. This technique according to Buddhist teaching on meditation, is necessary for the mind to achieve a state of tranquility (*Samatha*).

Samatha: Refers to a state of 'tranquility', where the mind is unperturbed, peaceful and lucid arising from the practice of concentration (*samathi*). One seeks to attain this mental state during the initial phase of meditation. This helps to facilitate the progression to insight (*vipassanā*) later on.

Samsara/Samsaric: Translated as "continuous movement" or "continuous flowing". In Buddhism, it refers to the concept of a cyclic process of birth, decay and death which is experienced by all beings in the universe. Escape from this cycle can only be achieved through enlightenment.

Saṅgha: The name given for the community of Buddhist monks. It is the third of the Three Gems and the Three Refuges comprising of the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *saṅgha*.

Sila, samādhi and *paññā*: Ethical conduct, concentration and wisdom. These three factors summarize the essence of the noble Eight-Fold Path.

Thammayut: The name of a new sect founded by King Mongkut as he was dissatisfied with the inconsistencies between the practices of the Thai monks and the monastic codes of the Pali canon. The name of this new sect, meaning 'the order adhering to the dhamma' espoused the king's interpretations on what constituted 'true Buddhism', which was characterized by strict discipline and practices based on a literal interpretation of the scriptures.

Vessantara Jataka: Known as Maha Wetsandon Chadok in Thai, it is one of the most popular stories about the past lives of the Buddha. It tells the story of a compassionate prince, Vessantara, who gives away everything he owns, including his children, thereby displaying the virtue of perfect charity. It is also known as the Great Birth Sermon (*Mahachat*).

Vinaya: Refers to the regulatory framework and disciplinary rules governing the Buddhist monastic community (saṅgha) based in the canonical texts.

***Vipassanā* Meditation Movement:** Refers to the meditation movement in Thailand which employs the meditation teachings of the Burmese monk Maha Sayadaw. It is also known as the *Yup Noh Phong Noh* method of meditation among the Thais. This movement first started from Wat Mahathat in the 1950s under the direction of its abbot, Phra Phimontham who felt that its relatively simple techniques would make it more accessible to the Thai laity.

***Vipassanā*:** Translated as 'insight'. Buddhist meditation teaches that attainment of this stage enables one to expose the truth of impermanency, the suffering and impersonal and unsubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence. This insight is not achieved from mere intellectual understanding, but through direct meditative observation of one's own bodily and mental process.

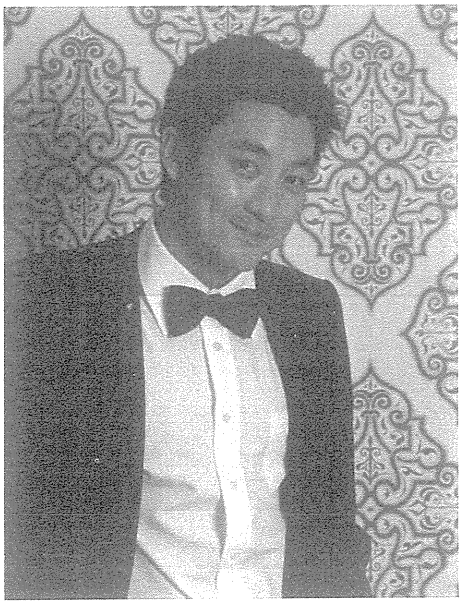
Visuddhimagga: Translated as the 'The Path of Purification', this manual was written by Buddhaghosa around 430 CE in Sri Lanka. It is a comprehensive manual condensing the theoretical and practical teachings of the Buddha and is considered the most important Theravāda text outside of the Pali canon.

***Yogāvacara* Manual:** An ancient Sri Lankan manuscript discovered by Anagrika H. Dharmapala in 1892. It was handed over to the Buddhist scholar T.W. Rhya. Davids, who translated the manual for the western audience. This manual is one of the texts used by contemporary Buddhist scholar Kate Crosby as part of her research into the esoteric traditions in the Theravāda Buddhist world. The text reveals commonalities in spiritual practices between the meditation practitioners of Sri Lanka and Mainland Southeast Asia.

Yogāvacara: Refers to a tradition of esoteric texts and practices that existed for many centuries within Theravāda mainland Southeast Asia. This tradition was considered normative Buddhist practice before the imposition of state Buddhism in the 19th century. Some scholars have referred to it as Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism. There is currently no academic consensus on which terminology to use.

The Author

Patrick Ong graduated with a bachelor's degree in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2001. Ten years later in 2011, he graduated with a Masters Degree in Thai Studies from the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. The determination to undertake research in Thailand emerged from his interest in discovering ancient lost healing practices, and contribute towards the knowledge of indigenous Thai Buddhist practices. Besides working in the Singapore civil service, Patrick also has a keen interest in holistic healing therapies, having been a practitioner of Reiki, a Japanese hand on energy healing technique for many years. He became a certified teacher in Feb 2009 and in his free time, has been teaching Reiki to both Thais and Singaporeans. The proceeds earned from teaching Reiki in Thailand (2011) was donated to a children's charity, the 'Phayathai Home for Babies'. Besides Reiki, Patrick is also a keen practitioner of other healing arts involving meditation, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), and the use of essential oils to promote emotional and physical well-being.



SUMMARY

About two-hundred years ago, a forest monk by the name of Suk Kaithuean emerged from the wilderness after his pilgrimage and settled in the newly established city of Bangkok. With just his walking stick and a collection of old manuscripts, which he inherited from an ancient lineage of meditation masters, the venerable played a pivotal role in the spiritual development of the kingdom and was eventually appointed as the Supreme Patriarch, the head of the Buddhist order. He taught an ancient system of meditation used for healing, which was then widespread and considered the standard of orthodox practice in Thailand. Today, there is scant information about Suk Kaithuean and his meditation system, which is now a 'dying' practice and taught only at one temple, Wat Ratchasittharam. Through interviews, personal experiences and research into ancient palm-leaf manuscripts, this book sheds new light into the life and teachings of this venerable monk and its implications for Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Ong graduated with a bachelor's degree in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2001. He subsequently graduated with a Master's Degree in Thai Studies from the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok in 2011. Besides his work in the Singapore civil service, Patrick has a keen interest in holistic healing therapies and is a qualified Reiki teacher, having been a practitioner in this Japanese hands on healing technique for many years.

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